

## Childhood Obesity Policy Recommendations

April 2011

There is growing recognition in all levels of government and in public arenas that childhood obesity is a critical but complex issue to address. The Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario (HSFO) is eager to contribute to that dialogue including providing advice to the government of Ontario on priorities for action following the upcoming provincial election in the fall of 2011. Consequently, HSFO convened an Expert Panel with representation from a wide range of sectors and perspectives to provide advice. (Please see names attached.)

The Expert Panel believed that specific policy recommendations must be viewed in the context of several broader themes:

- Importance of an overarching healthy child development policy across government
- Health equity
- Need for greater emphasis on prevention and health promotion across all governments
- Need to address the cost of health care as our children will pay with their wallets and with their health
- Need to place an emphasis on health within the education system – reading and writing is important, but having your health is everything
- Need to recognize the roles of all levels of governments – federal, provincial, territorial and municipal – and the school boards

The Expert Panel made the following five recommendations for the focus on the Ontario government over the next four years:

1. **The School as a Focus for Health:** there were a number of specific measures identified including funding for health and physical education, reintroduction of food education, healthy schools accreditation, sport/activity requirement for graduation and support for implementation of daily physical activity.
2. **Healthy Communities:** greater support and funding for community planning that encourages mixed land use, greater density to enhance active transportation that is safe, secure and financially viable. A specific concern that was expressed was the construction of mega-schools even at the elementary level that require busing.
3. **Active Play & After-School:** enhance recreational and informal play opportunities including making after-school and community programming and services more available and affordable. This would include removing barriers to informal play such as bylaws restricting street hockey.

4. **Equitable Healthy Food System:** There was recognition that multiple policy interventions and champions will be needed at various points within the food system. Supporting community food centres as a part of addressing a healthy food supply system from farm to table in a more equitable and integrated manner was seen as promising. It was recommended that the Nutritious Food Basket data collected by public health units be considered in setting public assistance levels.
5. **Calorie Counts on Menus:** there was specific support for calorie counts on menus and recognition of the value and benefit of being the first province to introduce.

Finally, the Expert Panel had some advice for HSFO as it continues to work in this arena:

- It is important that many players take responsibility as this is not an issue government can address on its own.
- There is value in HSFO continuing to raise this issue as we cannot assume that the public understands the urgency or that the public and politicians realize that individual choices are actually determined by environment.
- There is value in recruiting an internal champion within the government.
- How issues are framed is important in gaining popular support: e.g. Current opportunities may arise by supporting Ontario farmers or by maximizing the opportunities within the Pan Am games in 2015.
- There is value in many different voices even if some of these voices take a more strident position than HSFO would take.

## Expert Participant List

### Chair

Andrew Pipe, C.M., M.D., LL.D. (Hon), D.Sc. (Hon)  
Chief, Division of Prevention and Rehabilitation, University of Ottawa Heart Institute  
Board Member, Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario

Sacha Bhatia  
Cardiology Resident, University of Toronto

Bruce Davis  
President, Public Progress Inc.

Annie Kidder  
Executive Director, People for Education

Doug Manuel, MD, MSc. FRCPC  
ICES Adjunct Scientist

Chris Markham  
Executive Director and CEO, Ophea

John Matheson  
Principal, StrategyCorp

Katherine Morrison  
Pediatric Endocrinologist and Associate Professor, McMaster University

David L. Mowat, MBChB, MPH, FRCPC, FFPH  
Medical Officer of Health, Region of Peel

Nick Saul  
Executive Director, The Stop Community Food Centre

Neethan Shan  
Executive Director, Council of Agencies Serving South Asians

David Sparling, Ph.D.  
Professor and Chair in Agri-Food Innovation and Regulation, Richard Ivey School of Business,  
University of Western Ontario

Nina de Vaal  
Director, Recreation and Culture, Town of Oakville