

June 5, 2013

The Honourable Deb Matthews, MPP

Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care

RE: A response to the No Time to Wait: The Healthy Kids Strategy by The Sandbox Project Charity

Dear Honorable Minister,

On behalf of The Sandbox Project, we would first like to commend you on forming the Ontario Healthy Kids Panel to address a very important issue to all Canadians including Ontario: kid's health. As a national child and youth health charity we are encouraged that you have made this a priority to invest in the health of children as they truly are our future. While this report is a valuable resource that identified the status of Ontario children's health, there are some issues that have been identified by our Growing Healthy Bodies Working Group experts that we would like to bring to your attention.

Minister, as you know The Sandbox Project was created in response to the 2008 "Reaching for the Top" report to the Minister of Health for the Government of Canada by Dr. Kellie Leitch, and her finding that Canada is slipping further behind its peer countries when it comes to key health indicators for children and youth. The Sandbox Project provides leadership to act as a catalyst for change in Canada. It works directly with parents, business, health industry leaders, governments and non-governmental organizations to raise awareness, to pursue research and to collaborate to develop

solutions and better public policy. The Sandbox Project is unique in that we bring together academics, other not for profit organizations, government, parents and corporations to discuss child and youth health issues.

While this report is a valuable resource that identifies the status of Ontario children's health there are some issues that have been identified. Some of the areas for potential development regarding this report include:

- The focus group interviews did not include industry representatives. Industry is present in some of the recommendations including the recommendation to use corporate sponsorship to fund programs.
- The report does not look towards other programs or organizations to implement the report's recommendations or identify best practice programs currently underway in the province.
- We need to remember that even today, about 90% of kids across Canada are not obese. Increased weight does not cause poor health outcomes; rather, it is the environment, genetic and behavioral factors in the context of Canadian culture that lead to poor health. Higher weight is an associated (not causative) finding that occurs alongside poorer health. It is at best an imperfect marker for health.
- The media has largely focused on obesity and the marketing of food to children under 12. There was a significant amount of the report that has not garnered media attention (for example poverty, mental health, healthy weight, parents, the environment, sleep, television, etc). This is reflection of the emphasis of the report where a significant number of recommendations focus on marketing, while only one recommendation is on the issue of poverty or mental health.
- The recommendations were in a large part, "education" heavy. While working towards an educated population is never a bad thing and should be encouraged,

it is important to recognize the limited ability for education to elicit meaningful change.

- The increase of the Daily Physical Activity program from 20 minutes to 30 minutes per day is completely misguided. We know that DPA is poorly implemented; many teachers ignore their responsibilities all together when it comes to DPA. The little bit of research that has been done on DPA shows that students are not accumulating remotely close to the required amount of physical activity even when the program is being used. An additional 10 minutes of mandated time for this program does not address the fatal flaws in the design of the program.

While this report was a good first step, some further issues have been identified regarding the assumptions the report is based upon and should be considered as the government moves forward and works towards making kids healthier. What the province needs are more recommendations that are detailed and feasible and have a built in measure of outcome or accountability. It also has to be possible to implement in the context of how government is structured and how parents and families actually live their day to day lives. Otherwise we are wasting time and money that would be better served in other areas of health and social justice.

We are eager to see the implementation of the report and would be more than willing to help participate in this discussion going forward. The members of our working group represent a number of organizations that have already been hard at work on solutions that are feasible. We would welcome an opportunity to address the report in detail and to offer some options that could fill in the gaps and help implement the report.

Minister, we respectfully ask for an opportunity to meet with you to discuss this request for continuing substantial support for what we know you will recognize to be an important and much needed study.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Leora Pinhas

The Hospital for Sick Children
Co-Chair, Growing Healthy Bodies Working Group
The Sandbox Project

Dr. Christine Hampson

President and CEO
The Sandbox Project

Supporting members of The Sandbox Project Growing Healthy Bodies Working Group include:

- University of Toronto
- Sick Kids
- Ronald McDonald House Charity
- Corus Entertainment
- Health Canada
- Breakfast Cereals Canada
- Concerned Children's Advertisers
- Anaphylaxis Canada

- YMCA Canada

CC: ADM Ontario Health and Long-Term Care

The Growing Healthy Bodies Working Group members