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Ms Monika Turner
Director
Co-Chair, Program Standards Technical Review Committee (Acting)

Dear Monika

In response to the recently released draft of the Ontario Public Health Standards, the members of the Ontario Public Health Libraries Association would like to submit the following comments to the members of the Technical Review Committee.

Members of the Association applaud the emphasis in the draft on scientific literature, evidence-based public health planning and research and knowledge exchange as foundational standards of public health programming. Please find attached a document entitled *Core Competencies in Public Health Librarianship* which outlines the nature and scope of our work as information specialists within the public health system in Ontario.

The members of OPHLA are concerned by the ambiguity of the role of information professionals in the foundational standard public health research and in particular requirement 7 in the Research and Knowledge Exchange (KTE) section of the draft document:

(...) *Requirements:*

7. The board of health shall use a range of methods⁶ to provide public health professionals, community decision-makers, and community partners with information on the factors that underlie good public health, create public health risks, and support effective public health practice.

⁶ *This may include oral and poster presentations, published articles, lectures, professional development sessions, access to library services, best-practices workshops, web-site resources, list serves, e-bulletins, newsletters, mentoring, tool-kits, orientation sessions, etc.*

OPHLA members feel that one of the requirements for a successful KTE program is the presence of, or access to, accredited information services at the health unit level, and active participation of a trained Information Professional in the KTE team/program.

Collaboration with these professionals is essential to achieving optimal results in any research project. Many of our members have been providing research and reference services to Ontario public health unit staff for decades. At least three quarters of the health units in Ontario currently have access to library services, either through an onsite library professional or contracted library

services. The provision of evidence-based research to staff is an integral component of the services that we provide. Public health librarians perform complex, comprehensive and systematic literature searches in support of staff projects, provide individual and team training sessions on evidence retrieval, and continuously develop materials to assist end users in their research efforts.

Basic knowledge of the principles of searching must not be considered a substitute for the expertise of a trained information professional. We recognize that not all health units have access to the services of a library professional, and we wholeheartedly believe that learning these skills will prove valuable for public health professionals. However, performing a literature search which meets Evidence-Based Medicine criteria is a complicated and lengthy undertaking requiring advanced information retrieval techniques and access to resources which are not necessarily available to individual public health professionals. Effective evidence-based decision making requires that decision makers have access to the entire body of evidence on a given topic. Decisions based upon incomplete or faulty literature reviews could have potentially detrimental consequences for public health practice.

In the past OPHLA has lent expertise to numerous public health research and knowledge transfer initiatives at the local and provincial levels. Some of our recent projects include:

- **Creation of a web-based Virtual Library which is available to all public health units in Ontario.** OPHLA members identified key public health bibliographic databases with full-text journal content and obtained provincial funding for the provision of these resources via the Virtual Library page of the Public Health Ontario portal at <https://www.publichealthontario.ca>. Customized tutorials for end users with no in-house library support have also been designed by OPHLA and the Association provides ongoing support to all public health staff.
- **Presentation to key public health decision makers at the 2005 Joint Conference of the Ontario Public Health Association and the Association of Local Public Health Agencies.** OPHLA developed a resource document entitled "Tools and Vehicles for Knowledge Transfer: The Role of Information Professionals" and presented this paper at OPHA's symposium on *Determining Health through Public Health Action*. The conference program is available at: <http://www.opha.on.ca/activities/conference/2005FinalProgram.pdf>.
- **Preparation and facilitation of tutorials for the National Collaborating Centres Summer 2006 workshop.** OPHLA conducted education sessions on tools and methods for literature searching at this workshop in Toronto, with particular emphasis on the retrieval of evidence and grey literature.
- **Creation of public health information pathfinders and resources.** OPHLA has compiled extensive lists of free resources which are tailored to public health program areas which include grey literature sources, open access electronic journals, public health databases, sources for evidence-based information and web search tools which are available on our website at <http://www.ophla.ca/resources.htm> and can be linked to from the public health portal.

OPHLA members hope that the role of the Information Professional in provision of evidence-based literature for public health programming to public health staff will be incorporated in the new standard, even in the most general terms.

I look forward to further discussing OPHLA's involvement in this endeavour and have included my contact information below.

Sincerely,

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