

To help prevent chronic disease, Ontario should not cut public health funding

Opinion Jun 12, 2019 by Joan Stonehocker [YorkRegion.com](#)

What's the logic behind making beer and wine even more accessible while reducing our public health budget?

Public health is the science and art of preventing disease, prolonging life and promoting human health. In the recent provincial budget, drastic changes have been introduced for public health across Ontario, including reducing the number of units from 35 to 10 and downloading costs to municipalities.

We know public health is successful when large-scale disasters don't happen, when water and food are safe to consume, when quality of life is improved through the prevention of disease, and when people aren't getting sick or needing to go to the hospital. Public health is prevention.

Historically, common public health initiatives have included promotion of handwashing and breastfeeding, delivery of vaccinations, suicide prevention, and distribution of condoms. A crucial component of public health is the role it plays in preventing the serious threat of chronic disease.

In Ontario, 80 per cent of deaths are caused by heart disease, stroke, cancer and diabetes. Across Canada, these chronic diseases have a price tag of \$13.8 billion per year in direct and indirect costs, according to a University of Alberta study.

Public health is the best return on investment available, and interventions pay for themselves in reduced health care costs, with \$14 saved for every \$1 invested.

Ontario is the only province in Canada where the provincial government does not pay 100 per cent of the costs of public health.

Proposed changes to public health funding would mean that the province invests less, and municipalities and regions are responsible for making up the shortfall or skimping on important programs.

When every other province sees the value and return on investment in public health, why is Ontario reducing the budget, while simultaneously increasing the threat of chronic disease, substance abuse and domestic abuse by making alcohol more accessible?

Investment in public health needs to be valued and prioritized. Tell your MPP that you care about public health.

—Joan Stonehocker's lifelong passion for growing and eating healthy food aligns perfectly with her role as the executive director of York Region Food Network and acting chair of the York Region Food Council. Under her leadership, the committed team at YRFN advocates for income responses to food insecurity, and continuously develops and promotes healthy food projects that are a catalyst for building strong and vibrant communities.

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Funding public health should be a priority for province, writes York Region Food Network executive director Joan Stonehocker

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