



STRENGTHENING PUBLIC HEALTH NURSING CAPACITY

ANDSOOHA Submission to the
Local Capacity Review Committee

AUGUST, 2005

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INTRODUCTION

This paper summarizes the input of ANDSOOHA to the Ministry of Health and Long-term Care's Public Health Capacity Review Committee in the following areas:

- Human Health Resources,
- Management and Leadership, and
- Public Health Funding.

ANDSOOHA: Public Health Nursing Management in Ontario is an association of nurse managers, directors and supervisors of public health agencies who advocate for the promotion of excellence in public health nursing. ANDSOOHA's mission is to promote excellence in public health nursing administration and practice and to provide a united voice for public health nursing managers in Ontario. Membership includes 112 active nurse managers from every region of the province. As a constituent society of the Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA), and the Association of Local Public Health Agencies (alPHA), ANDSOOHA has been pleased to provide input into the collective submissions of both these agencies to the Local Capacity Review Committee. ANDSOOHA appreciates this opportunity to provide this input specifically from a public health nursing perspective.

Human Health Resources

ANDSOOHA prepared a Leadership Position Paper in August 2003 which outlined the link between effective leadership and the development of high-performing organizations. Strong discipline leadership in multidisciplinary environments not only serves to support excellence in professional practice but also greatly contributes to realizing public health goals across the system. In 1999, the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long Term Care produced the report Good Nursing, Good Health: An Investment for the 21st Century, a Report of the Nursing Task Force which included a number of recommendations to address critical issues in the nursing environment. In February 2000, as a response to the nursing leadership related recommendations of this report, the Chief Medical Officer of Health and the Provincial Chief Nursing Officer called on Medical Officers of Health to support visible nursing leadership positions in their health units. A survey conducted in the spring of 2001 identified that only 50% of provincial health units had a Chief Nursing Officer position or equivalent and to date, little progress has been made to improve this situation.

ANDSOOHA recognizes the value of maximizing the knowledge and skills for all professional groups across public health units. It is essential that multidisciplinary work environments support achieving the highest practice standards for all professional groups and that knowledge and skills are fully utilized within defined scopes of practice. Strong, visible nursing leadership is crucial to maintaining current knowledge of professional requirements and ensuring that the highest nursing standards are maintained across health units. Structured quality assurance and clear professional accountability across public health units not only supports our public health mandate but fosters excellence in the quality of public health programs and services to the communities we serve (ANDSOOHA, August 2003).

Public health nurses comprise the largest single discipline of the public health work force and play a valuable role in all functions of our public health system (population health assessment,

surveillance, health promotion, disease and injury prevention and health protection). The role of nurses in providing public health programs, services and roles needs to be recognized and maintained. The value of public health nurses in terms of their versatility and broad scope of practice support the ongoing use of nurses in health promotion activities as well as clinical and health protection programs. The ability to utilize public health nurses in a variety of programs and roles provides an organization with a level of flexibility and surge capacity that few other disciplines can provide. SARS provided the best example of the value of a significant nursing workforce during an unprecedented public health crisis. The public health system needs public health nurses for what it requires today and what it may require in the future.

Recommendations

- Ensure that each health unit has a Senior Nursing Officer with authority to carry out key responsibilities for professional best practices, public health nursing policy and inter-ministerial collaboration.
- Amend the HPPA to reflect the requirement for a Senior Nursing Officer in each health unit.
- Recognize the versatility, skill set and broad scope of practice of public health nurses by ensuring that public health nurses are utilized to their full capacity in all appropriate functions of the public health system.

Management and Leadership

In October 2000, ANDSOOHA identified nursing leadership as a strategic issue for the membership. The 1990's were a challenging period for public health nurses in the province. The shift from discipline based service delivery models to multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary work teams, a loss of senior nursing-specific management positions in health units and the emerging nursing recruitment and retention challenges prompted ANDSOOHA to focus on promoting an understanding of professional leadership in supporting quality work environments. Recent ANDSOOHA projects have included development and promotion of community health nursing standards, management workshops, networking initiatives and a mentorship/preceptorship project. The ANDSOOHA membership continues to identify the need for ongoing opportunities for management professional development with an increased emphasis in leadership and succession training.

ANDSOOHA has also maintained its involvement with Council of Ontario University Programs in Nursing/College Partners (COUPN/CAATS) to support the preparation of nursing students for public health practice through curriculum design and clinical placements. While strongly supporting the role of health units in supporting nursing education, health units across the province have been challenged in maintaining their level of support. In addition, increasing enrolments in nursing programs and the recent shift from certificate to degree preparation for nursing graduates have increased the demand for clinical placements in public health units. Nursing workloads and nursing shortages have similarly compromised many health units' ability to support the demand for clinical placements. Support for the educational preparation of new public health practitioners is critical to ensuring the future capacity of the public health system.

Recommendations

- Provide increased opportunities for management training, with an increased emphasis on leadership and succession training
- Focus efforts on identifying and addressing the barriers to clinical student placements in health units

Public Health Funding

While significant debate has occurred over the past two years on the funding of the public health system, there is no question that public health units have yet to realize the “reinvestment” promised for public health. Of the recent provincial enhanced funding, only 7% has come to public health, with the majority of spending focussed on the “health care” system. Overall funding to our public health system needs to be increased. While ANDSOOHA supports continued cost sharing with municipalities to support municipal engagement in public health services, efforts need to be made to ensure municipalities fulfil their requirement to fund Board of Health approved budgets. With respect to 100% provincial funded programs, these budgets must be increased to adequately fund full operational and administrative costs.

Public health units require adequate and sustainable funding to attract and retain public health staff. With respect to nursing, we have yet to see the recruitment of nurses into the health care system promised in the recent budget. ANDSOOHA supports a balance between health promotion and health protection in public health work. The role of health promotion in improving the health of our communities must be recognized and supported in program standards, requirements and funding priorities. Research needs to continue and expand in the field of health promotion to establish and confirm best practices.

Finally, the issue of what programs and services are funded and the monitoring of service standards must be addressed. While a small number of Mandatory Programs and Services Guidelines underwent an extensive review process beginning in 2000, resulting in significant recommendations for changes based on research/evidence, revised standards have yet to be released. Many Mandatory Programs and Services have not been reviewed in any meaningful way in almost a decade. A review of all Mandatory Programs and Services Guidelines must be completed and revisions made to ensure programs and services are effective, up-to-date, and meet best practice standards.

Recommendations

- Continue and expand research in the field of health promotion to establish and confirm best practices
- Release revised Mandatory Programs and Services Guidelines for programs that were reviewed in the period since 2000 along with enhanced funding to support revised guidelines.
- Initiate a review of all other Mandatory Programs and Services Guidelines.

ANDSOOHA welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the Local Capacity Review Committee.