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SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS MADE, BUT WORK REMAINS TO BE DONE TO RENEW PUBLIC HEALTH SAYS CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH

Dr. Sheela Basrur releases first status report on public health to the Ontario Legislature

TORONTO – Significant progress in renewing Ontario’s public health system has been made in the past two years but more needs to be done Chief Medical Officer of Health (CMOH) Dr. Sheela Basrur said today as she released her first report to the Ontario legislature on the status of Ontario’s public health system.

“This report can be thought of as a check-up on the province’s public health system,” said Dr. Basrur. “Overall, my assessment is one of guarded optimism. We’ve made significant progress since SARS, but more needs to be done, especially with respect to strengthening our public health laboratories, and recruiting more Medical Officers of Health to fill vacancies across the province.”

The province’s CMOH was granted additional powers and more independence through legislative amendments passed in 2004. As part of this new independence the CMOH must now report directly to the legislature on the state of public health every year.

The report, *Building the Foundation of a Strong Public Health System for Ontarians*, points to the progress made over the past two years and the areas of continuing concern.

Progress made to date includes:

- An ongoing review of the capacity of the province’s 36 public health units.
- Planning for the creation of Ontario’s first Public Health Agency.
- Strengthened capacity to control infectious diseases with the creation of a Provincial Infectious Diseases Advisory Committee (PIDAC), Regional Infection Control Networks, infection control training for front line health care workers and increased funding to raise the number of infection control professionals.
- Establishment of the Emergency Management Unit to co-ordinate responses to health emergencies and outbreaks.
- The release of an updated and detailed plan for an influenza pandemic.
- Creation of the Ministry of Health Promotion to focus on health prevention.

Areas of continuing concern include:

- Shortage of staff and inadequate facilities and technology within the Public Health Laboratory System.
- Vacancies in Medical Officer of Health and other positions at public health units.
- Emergency planning and response involving First Nations communities needs to be developed and coordinated with all levels of government.

- Communications with front line medical staff needs to be strengthened to help recognize, control and prevent infectious diseases.

“Ontario is better prepared for infectious disease emergencies than we were three years ago when we struggled through SARS,” said Dr. Basrur. “But we must not allow the momentum for system renewal to dissipate. We should be encouraged by the progress that has been made and redouble our efforts to ensure that Ontarians have the public health system they deserve.”

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