



Canadian Institute of Public Health Inspectors

L'Institut canadien des inspecteurs en santé publique

POSITION STATEMENT

“The Need to Implement a Continuing Professional Competency Program
for the Environmental Public Health Profession in Canada”

National Executive Council
Canadian Institute of Public Health Inspectors

September 1, 2005

“Health Protection: Cornerstone of Public Health”



Background

Recent Public Health calamities in Canada, such as SARS and waterborne disease outbreaks, have highlighted the need for an overhaul and renewal of the Public Health system in Canada. Numerous commissions and public inquiries looking into these events, such as the Naylor & Campbell Reports, the Walkerton Inquiry, the North Battleford Inquiry, the Walker Report and the Krever Inquiry have shed considerable light on some of the failures and successes within the Public Health system during the past decade.

In addition, some regionalized events within Canada have provoked provincial commissions and public inquiries to take a closer look at Public Health's "frontline". For example in Ontario, allegations of illegal activities at certain provincial abattoirs, coupled with the ongoing BSE crisis, have resulted in The Meat Inspection Review (Haines Report). One of the recommendations in the report included the necessity for a plan of continuing education and training of Public Health Inspectors across the province addressing the meat safety and the regulatory standards for food premises. In essence, the profession was found to lack certain skills, abilities and the professional credibility necessary to do the job.

Meanwhile other milestone reports such as the Romanow Commission and the Kirby Report have provided Canadians with road maps for meaningful change and improvements to the public health system. Despite their varying origins and terms of reference, each of the reports mentioned above have echoed the need for a comprehensive revitalization of Public Health's human resources and infrastructure and the need to integrate them into a national Public Health framework. *(Note: For a complete list of these reports, refer to the Appendix.)*

In September of 2004, the Federal/Provincial/Territorial (FPT) Health Ministers met and identified Public Health renewal as a top priority on their agenda. The FPT Ministers agreed to develop a 10-year Pan-Canadian strategy for Public Health and its frontline workers. One component of the strategy includes human resource planning and focuses on the importance of inter-professional approaches to addressing Public Health issues. The plan also recognizes the urgent need for building up frontline "surge" capacity in preparation for potential large-scale events such as pandemic influenza or the emergence of an organism with SARS-like implications.

It is a widely held belief that an inter-professional approach will encourage frontline workers and health agencies to function beyond their localized mindset and lead to enhanced collaboration among these groups – and that this in turn will serve to overcome barriers that currently hamper effective response and intervention strategies. The human resources component of the FPT Health Ministers' plan includes a commitment for significant investments in post-secondary education and a firm resolve to establish core competencies

for the Public Health workforce in Canada. The rationale for establishing pan-Canadian and inter-professional core competencies is that it will make it possible to bring together people from across the country – regardless of their discipline - and equip them to work together in a seamless and optimal fashion for the benefit of current and future generations of Canadians.

Core competencies are the foundation of human resource planning and development. Simply defined, *“core competencies are the knowledge, skills, and abilities required for all public health professionals that are critical to effective and efficient functioning of an organization or group of health agencies.”*

For the first time in Canadian history, the Public Health system has political, financial and bureaucratic support to increase the human resource capacity within the system. Political analysts and executive officials from various sectors advise that the window of opportunity is short and that all organizations and professions need to embrace the changes and commitments put forth by the FPT Health Ministers' Conference last fall. The Canadian Institute of Public Health Inspectors (CIPHI) intends to embrace these reforms as a commitment to the profession and the Canadian public.

One of the tangible results of the FPT Health Ministers' national plan to overhaul Public Health has resulted in the recent creation of the *Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC)* and the appointment of Dr. David Butler-Jones as the Chief Medical Health Officer of Canada. This agency now provides for clear Federal leadership in Public Health and a mechanism for accountability. The FPT Ministers' public commitment of significant “new” investments in Public Health infrastructure will enable the kind of consultative processes necessary in establishing core competencies for all health professions. Establishing these core competencies and fostering them are key to the successful implementation of this pan-Canadian strategy to improve Public Health at the local, regional and national levels.

The Importance of a Continuing Professional Competency Program for CIPHI & the Environmental Public Health Profession

All of us realize what a challenging and fast-paced field Public Health can be and we recognize the need to keep pace with the ever-changing demands and needs of the public. As Environmental Public Health Professionals (EHP's), it is just as important that we continue to grow and move forward to keep pace with the dynamic world we live in.

The Continuing Professional Competencies initiative is of vital importance to the profession for many reasons, but some of the key outcomes the National Executive Council (NEC) has identified are:

- CIPHI has been engaged by the Public Health Agency of Canada to define and establish the discipline-specific skills for “entry into practice” and for “**continuing**” of competencies in the field of Environmental Public Health. This agreement and consultative process ensures that the profession has direct input in defining its own discipline’s skills, abilities and knowledge requirements, as opposed to having no control or input into the process
- By identifying the discipline-specific skills for EPHP’s, the profession will establish “professional” recognition and equal status along side other Public Health professionals.
- A means to measure ongoing competency is needed in order to document and prove that EPHP’s are competent and meet current needs of the Public Health System. (Note: CIPHI currently has the certification process to ensure competency for “entry to practice”, but no means of measuring “**continuing**” competency thereafter.)
- The development of a National Standard of Practice with a clearly outlined Code of Ethics and shared values will help to establish an accountability system.
- The development of a continuing professional competency program will ensure ongoing continuing education opportunities are made available consistently and equally throughout all regions of Canada.
- The curricula of the educational institutions will be kept current and relevant.

By way of direct membership, the Institute represents approximately two-thirds of the Canadian Environmental Public Health workforce. However, the Institute is the organization that represents and certifies this professional body and has long maintained that it is the voice for EPHP’s in Canada.

During its recent strategic planning session in April 2005, the Institute re-visited its Vision and Mission Statement and made some amendments to reflect the principles enshrined in its Constitution originally issued by the Secretary of State for Canada. The following summarizes the changes that were adopted by the National Executive Council during that planning session:

Vision: *“Health Protection: Cornerstone of Public Health”*

Mission Statement: *“CIPHI advances the profession, science and field of Environmental Public Health through certification, advocacy, education and setting standards. We protect the health of Canadians and represent environmental public health professionals across Canada.”*

As part of its mandate, CIPHI certifies all individuals who hold the Certificate in Public Health Inspection (Canada)*. The CPHI(C) is the nationally recognized credential for entry to practice as an EPHP. Therefore, it is incumbent upon CIPHI to take action to secure our constituents' place during the upcoming reforms to the Public Health system. In view of the fact that CIPHI owns and administers the CPHI(C), it is CIPHI's duty to have the credential duly recognized by others within the Public Health system and government as "professional". It is also critical to have Environmental Public Health (a component of Health Protection) acknowledged as an essential and founding element of the Public Health system.

Lacking the formal "professional" designation has sometimes impeded the profession's placement within the Public Health community by undermining the true value of its own skills set. This has limited the profession's ability to move up the ranks and take these unique abilities to higher levels within an organization or within the Public Health system itself. This lack of professional designation has resulted in the profession having a limited voice at the tables where fiscal and policy decisions are made and it has reduced its ability to champion for preventative health programs such as Environmental Public Health. Virtually every CPHI(C) would agree that we know we are truly "professional" but we haven't been able to demonstrate this conclusively beyond our own circles in a clear and accepted manner. As duly elected representatives of the profession, the National Executive Council believes that the establishment of a Continuing Professional Competency Program for Public Health and for our discipline is the model by which the profession can truly begin to document and declare itself "professional".

(*includes the CSI(C) designation previously administered by the Canadian Public Health Association.)

Conclusions & Policy Statement:

1. It is the National Executive Council's (NEC) position that the Pan-Canadian initiative to reform the Public Health system be used as a mechanism to implement a system of accountability within the profession. Accountability is a core component of the wave to reform the Public Health system and that the political will is present to see effective and meaningful changes take place. It is also the NEC's belief that the changes will occur with or without our profession's input and that there is an opportunity to influence how these changes will occur. Professional accountability and recognition can be achieved by implementing a Continuing Professional Competency Program.
2. It is the NEC's position that as the organization that issues the CPHI(C) credential, it must take on a strong leadership role to ensure that it is a full participant and has a positive influence on all decisions relating to the Environmental Public Health profession.
3. The NEC hereby declares that CIPHI fully supports this process because it believes there must be increased recognition of the valuable and unique skills of Environmental Public Health professionals within the Public Health system. The CPHI(C) credential must be upheld and found beyond criticism by any tribunal, legislative body or other external entity that questions its legitimacy or competency. The CPHI(C) credential must also be positioned in such a manner that it is acknowledged and respected by other allied health professionals and by the various levels of Government across Canada. The NEC believes that the profession cannot move forward without embracing the changes associated with the Pan-Canadian strategy to reform and enhance the Public Health system's workforce and credentials.

For further details and updates on the Continuing Professional Competency program, please visit the Institute's website at:

<http://www.ciphi.ca/corecomp.htm>

For more background information on the need to improve the Public Health system, please refer to the CIPHI's position statement entitled: ***"Canada's Public Health Protection System: The Need for a National Strategy to Revitalize Frontline Environmental Public Health (EPH) Services"*** - October 1, 2004

<http://www.ciphi.ca/advocacy.htm>

This Position Statement was endorsed by the National Executive Council, this 1st day of September, 2005.

C. Kurzac, National President

S. MacLean, National Past-President

S. Chong, President
(BC Branch)

P. Phan, President
(AB Branch)

K. Cross, President
(SK Branch)

S. Gravelle, President
(MB Branch)

M. Duncan, President
(ON Branch)

T. Carroll, President
(NB Branch)

B. Morrison, President
(NS/PEI Branch)

P. Noseworthy, President
(NL Branch)

Appendix: List of Inquiry & Commission Reports

"Building on Values: The Future of Health Care in Canada" (Final Report), Roy J. Romanow, Q.C. Commissioner, Commission of the Future of Health Care in Canada, (November 28, 2002).

"Report of the Commission of Inquiry into matters relating to the safety of the public drinking water in the City of North Battleford, Saskatchewan", The Honourable Robert D. Laing, Commissioner, Government of Saskatchewan, (March 28, 2002).

"Report of the Walkerton Inquiry", The Honourable Dennis R. O'Connor, Commissioner, Ontario Ministry of the Attorney General, Queen's Printer for Ontario, (2002).

"Learning from SARS: Renewal of Public Health in Canada" (A report of the National Advisory Committee on SARS and Public Health), Dr. David Naylor (Chair), Health Canada, Her Majesty the /Queen in Right of Canada, (October 2003).

"Farm to Fork: A Strategy For Meat Safety in Ontario" (Report of the Meat Regulatory and Inspection Review), The Honourable Roland J. Haines, Ontario Ministry of the Attorney General, (2004).

"Royal Commission of Inquiry on the Blood System in Canada" (Final Report), Justice Horace Krever, Government of Canada, © 1997 Public Works and Government Services Canada.

"SARS and Public Health in Ontario", The Honourable Archie Campbell, Ontario Ministry of Health, (April 2004).

"For the Public's Health: A Plan of Action", (Final Report of the Ontario Expert Panel on SARS and Infectious Disease Control), D. Walker et al., (2004), Toronto.