

## **OHCOW Strategic plan – 2009 - 2011**

### **How OHCOW developed this plan**

For two decades, OHCOW has played a unique role in improving the health and safety of Ontario workers, particularly through the work of our multi-disciplinary team of health and safety professionals. We have responded to the needs of workers in all sectors and from all parts of the province. This has included support to individual workplaces as well as vital work with many partners to support workers and their families involved in large clusters of occupational diseases.

Many challenges and pressures now face OHCOW as we build on our proud history and move into the future. So during 2008 we embarked on an ambitious strategic planning process. We engaged our staff, Board, the worker community and our many partners in the best possible ways, to explore key issues and develop a clear plan to move forward together.

This strategic plan results from extensive discussions with all of these key stakeholders. There were two key components to the planning process – a general strategic plan review from January to June 2008 and a concurrent review of several crucial issues which needed more focused attention.

Stakeholder and staff consultation included visits by the Managing Director to the five current clinics, plus Peterborough and London. These meetings included consultation with OHCOW staff, Local Advisory Committees and key local unions and other partners. The focus was on the types of services and interventions which are most important in each local area, and what they would like to see OHCOW doing in the future. .

In addition to the local visits were a special Board of Directors meeting in January dedicated to strategic plan review; an all-staff conference in February, including many of OHCOW's physicians; focused provincial-level consultations with key partners – unions, other worker community organizations, OHSCO partners, and WSIB senior management; and a two day workshop in April focusing on OHCOW's role in occupational health and safety research.

Eight key issues were identified for intensive review by dedicated working groups. These working groups gathered key background information and developed recommendations to submit to the strategic plan review.

- Reviewing the services provided by OHCOW, with a focus on consistent descriptions and reporting, as well as best practices in delivering those services; along with specific review of the role and services provided by each of OHCOW's professional disciplines other than physicians.
- OHCOW's potential role in accreditation
- OHCOW's potential role in targeted workplace intervention strategy. Including consideration of the performance measures and types of

information which OHCOW would need from partners; with a special focus on how to reach and support the most vulnerable workers.

- Strengthening the partnership with WHSC
- Potential OHCOW involvement in disability prevention/RTW, particularly around ergonomics/MSD prevention, including partnership with the Occupational Disability Response Team.
- Issues around physicians. These were addressed separately because the physicians are not employees of OHCOW.
- OHCOW's role in research and workplace/community based investigations, both formal and participatory, as well as risk mapping and knowledge transfer. Included the role of OHCOW's professionals in developing information tools and resources for workplaces.
- OHCOW's role in addressing occupational health and safety issues in the context of broader environmental and public health considerations and concerns.

### **An overview of the strategic plan**

The plan begins with a scan of key environmental factors. This is not meant to be comprehensive, but selective in identifying factors of particular importance in developing OHCOW's strategic plan. Even this basic scan illustrates the complexity of the environment within which OHCOW and other prevention organizations must find the best way to move forward.

Next is a summary of input received during the consultation period. This shows the passion and thoughtfulness of OHCOW's staff, Board members, stakeholders and partners, as they helped us address our challenges and map out future directions.

Following the input summary is a revised vision and mission statement. This reflects the significant changes which have taken place since OHCOW's last strategic plan was formulated.

The heart of the plan is the set of key strategic directions which respond to the environmental factors and consultation input, and which will focus OHCOW's work over the next three years.

The final section lays out the approach to implementation.

### **Key environmental factors**

#### **External factors**

#### **Economic, social and demographic**

- Erosion of Ontario's traditional industrial base, with continuing severe threats from foreign competition and the high dollar.

- Growing interest in ensuring that Ontario’s trade competitors be required to operate on a level playing field – to meet the same OHS standards as we achieve in Ontario.
- The economy continues to evolve toward a more fragmented situation dominated by small and medium sized workplace, including increasing numbers of vulnerable workers – especially immigrant and migrant workers, and those working for labour brokers, temporary agencies or in questionable “independent operator” arrangements. There is also a growing population of aging workers.
- Ontarians are much more concerned about the environment – both climate change and environmental pollution. This includes growing awareness, concern and media attention to occupational exposures, particularly carcinogenic ones.

### **The prevention system**

- Ontario’s prevention system is beginning a new cycle of workplace interventions and support. The new strategy is built around the vision that it is possible to **eliminate** occupational disease and injuries.
- OHCOW is positioned to play a major role. First, OHCOW’s multi-disciplinary professional teams are unique in the prevention system and can contribute tools and resources with system-wide as well as local impact. Second, through our clinical work, OHCOW has a unique role in detecting occupational health conditions and helping workers show work-relatedness.
- OHCOW has a lead role in facilitating system discussions about performance measures and data/information needs. This includes significant potential for adding performance measures which would be more supported by the worker community (e.g., deeper leading indicators of strong health and safety programs in workplaces) and improved access by OHCOW to information gathered by WSIB and other partners, thus strengthening our prevention role.
- OHCOW also has an important role at OHSCO in the development of an occupational disease prevention strategy. This opens up significant opportunities for OHCOW to have an increased impact on disease prevention. At the same time, the OHSCO initiative around ergonomics and MSD prevention, in which OHCOW has played an important role, is moving forward into all sectors,
- The government has recently implemented the Regulatory Modernization Act, which will support broad initiatives recognizing high performers, targeting chronic violators and sharing information among multiple regulatory authorities.
- Ontario’s Health and Safety Associations (HSAs) are getting more involved supporting workplaces around disability prevention/return to work.
- WSIB is moving forward with proposals for implementing a system of accreditation of OHS programs in Ontario workplaces. This opens up the possibility of putting a label of good performance on healthy and safe workplaces in Ontario – and then being able to demand a similar standard of performance from foreign competitors.
- The government is addressing the Campbell Commission recommendations, which emerged from the 2003 SARS outbreak

- Labour partners are expressing interest in increased OHCOW involvement in several key areas which relate to non-industrial workplaces – for example, health care sector OHS issues, pandemic preparedness and workplace violence and harassment – and more generally psycho-social issues such as stress.
- Labour partners are asking that OHCOW consider involvement in “exit assessments” of workers as workplaces close down and workers retire or are laid off, with concerns about their current and future health status.

## **Internal factors**

OHCOW has gone through a lengthy period of internal difficulties and then an extended period of recruitment of a managing director. Although good leadership was in place for that time period, and substantial progress has been made, there are a number of outstanding issues which need to be addressed. The most important of these are listed below:

### **Services and resources**

- OHCOW’s local clinics developed from the ground up, in their communities. There is a need for greater consistency in service delivery approach across the province.
- Major challenges determining the allocation of scarce resources to many competing needs – individual cases, clusters of cases, workplace support and intervention, knowledge transfer and various types of investigations and research projects. And more generally, finding the right balance of OHCOW’s clinical and prevention work.
- Addressing the loss of resources for current clinics, and longstanding requests for additional OHCOW clinics and resources (especially Thunder Bay, the GTA, Ottawa, London, Sault Ste. Marie and Peterborough).
- Difficult issues around whether OHCOW should plan to generate additional revenue beyond its WSIB funding.

### **Human resources**

- The lack of a comprehensive human resources plan.
- Addressing issues related to OHCOW’s doctors, to ensure a good cooperative relationship between OHCOW and the doctors who work with us.

### **Information management, communications and technology**

- The need to address issues around technology infrastructure and hardware as well as longstanding issues around OHCOW’s case management system and database.
- The lack of a comprehensive OHCOW communications plan and protocols for dealing with sensitive and high profile issues. Including making OHCOW’s website more dynamic and responsive to client and partner needs.
- The need to strengthen OHCOW’s internal communications, including ways for each of the professional disciplines within OHCOW to link on a provincial level.

## **Partnerships**

- There are two basic challenges in partnerships: identifying the most important partners and ensuring effective relationships; while also maintaining the core role and independence of OHCOW with workers and their unions. Particularly important is to strengthen OHCOW's partnership with WSIB and WSIAT while maintaining our independent role supporting workers in their workers' compensation claims.
- Identifying the best approach for the way that OHCOW works with the key labour related organizations – the Workers' Health and Safety Centre, ODRT and Labour Studies programs.
- Addressing longstanding issues about the ways that OHCOW works with worker representatives and local communities around clusters of cases.

## **What we heard**

During the consultation period, OHCOW staff, Board, stakeholders and partners participated very actively. Their input and recommendations responded to the many environmental factors outlined above. A summary of key input is set out below. The strategic directions are based very largely upon the consultation input.

## **Clinical services**

- Very strong support from unions, staff and BOD members, for strengthening OHCOW's role as a resource to individual workers, groups of workers and unions, to help them detect and validate potentially work-related health conditions. OHCOW is seen as a vital, unique and trusted resource to work with workers, unions and communities.
- Several unions proposed to partner with OHCOW to carry out health assessments and take occupational histories, for workers exiting industrial employment or whose workplaces are closing down permanently.
- A significant call for OHCOW to expand its intake clinic approach to cover ergonomics, violence and infectious disease issues.
- The ODRT proposed to partner with OHCOW on an innovative workplace based joint return to work project. However, many OHCOW staff, Board and stakeholders expressed concern that OHCOW might be swamped by individual return to work cases, and lose our focus on the detection and prevention of injury and disease.
- Many want OHCOW to make better links between the detection of disease and injury and prevention, including proposals for using our patient database to identify emerging prevention priorities.
- A call for restoring resources which OHCOW's clinics have lost, and for establishing OHCOW clinics in other parts of the province – Thunder Bay, London, Sault Ste. Marie, Ottawa, Peterborough, and the GTA.

- Strengthening OHCOW services and accessibility to vulnerable worker communities, such as immigrant workers and migrant farm workers.
- A strong call for more consistency in OHCOW services across the province.

### **Prevention services**

- The consultation process revealed a rich history of OHCOW working with workers, unions and many other partners to identify and analyze workplace hazards, and to help the workplace parties work for prevention. There was strong support for OHCOW's participatory approach.
- There was a very strong negative reaction to the proposal that OHCOW generate significant revenue from its prevention work, stemming from concern that this would potentially warp OHCOW's priorities toward whatever would generate revenue. Some unions also argued that their employers, which are hard pressed in the current economic environment, were already paying for prevention services through their WSIB assessments.
- A number of unions called for OHCOW to strengthen its capacity to work with them on dealing with psycho-social issues and hazards in workplaces, particularly prevention of violence and harassment.
- A call for OHCOW to do better reaching small workplaces and vulnerable workers.

### **Participating in prevention initiatives which address environmental or public health as well as occupational health.**

- OHCOW is often involved in dealing with exposures and health problems which have both an occupational and environmental or public health dimension. Some of these situations have raised difficult issues between the workers and their unions, and those in the community concerned about environmental impacts. Many partners identified the need to develop integrated solutions to complex multi-factorial problems such as cancer prevention.
- There are important opportunities for partnerships with other parts of the government and broader public sector, for example, Local Health Integration Networks.

### **Research, knowledge transfer, tool development and educational services**

- A special research workshop was convened in April 2008 with 60 OHCOW staff, Board members, and key worker community and research partners attending.
- Participants at the workshop presented a rich and varied history of the exceptional contribution which OHCOW and its partners have made to workplace based, participatory research, as well as more traditional research. The overwhelming majority of the projects involved participatory research intended to support

collective action for the recognition and prevention of work-related health conditions – “action research”.

- Much of this research is not widely known and many participants expressed the desire to be kept better informed about the projects and their findings.
- Workshop participants argued strongly for OHCOW to be better funded for research, and more broadly for the funding of worker and union health and safety research activities.

### **Educational services**

- Local partners and activists noted the need for better communication and education on specific local high profile situations which OHCOW is involved in.
- Unions and local activists expressed interest in a more systematic approach by OHCOW, working with other partners such as labour councils, WHSC, ODRT and OFL, on local and provincial level educational initiatives such as the highly successful lung disease conference in Sudbury in 2007.
- A number of those consulted identified OHCOW’s website as an underused educational resource.

### **Partnerships**

#### **Workplace based partnerships**

- Strong input that workers and their unions need to have a trusted source of service, support and advice, to help them participate fully and equally with employers and with the prevention system in detecting and ultimately eliminating occupational disease and injury. This means that workers and unions will often want to bring their concerns to OHCOW before they take them anywhere else, to help them prepare for engagement with the employer and other partners in resolving those concerns. Workers and unions see OHCOW as “their” place, just as employers have many resources, some funded by the WSIB, which they can turn to.
- Several unions expressed the desire to develop more strategic and province wide partnerships with OHCOW, to have an impact on major health and safety issues such as MSD prevention and violence prevention.
- Unions also expressed concerns about a lack of consistency in the way in which OHCOW worked with unions, particularly in dealing with clusters of occupational disease and through intake clinics.

#### **Partnerships within the Ontario prevention system**

- From virtually every participant in the planning consultation, we heard about the importance of partnerships and OHCOW’s role within the prevention system. A common theme was that OHCOW has a dual role – a trusted resource for the worker community and a bridge/facilitator of worker and especially union partnerships with the prevention system.

- Worker and union representatives emphasized their opposition to measuring success of the prevention system by reliance on lost time injury statistics. They argued for the use of leading indicators of good health and safety.
- Worker and union representatives also expressed great caution about engaging OHCOW with the accreditation process. They do want alternatives to experience rating, but want approaches which will fully involve workers and their unions, and recognize and reward true investment and commitment to health and safety.
- Union activists recommended strengthening OHCOW's partnership with the two other labour directed organizations - WHSC and the ODRT.
- Many prevention system organizations want to partner with OHCOW, especially around occupational disease prevention and participatory workplace interventions where OHCOW's multi-disciplinary approach would add value.
- During the consultation period, OHCOW was given a lead role at OHSCO around occupational disease prevention, as well as a lead role around the development of new performance measures for prevention.

### **Commitment to service excellence and to the wellbeing of our staff**

- OHCOW staff expressed concerns about the stress of the past few years, the impact of the erosion of staffing levels and the pressures pulling them in so many different directions. On the other hand, there is an expression of real hope for the future, accompanied by a desire to be listened to, respected and fully involved.
- OHCOW staff have a high expectation that OHCOW will be an exemplary healthy and safe organization.
- There is some lack of clarity and inconsistency in job roles within OHCOW, reflecting the challenges of a multi-disciplinary approach in a relatively small organization which has faced staffing and budgetary pressures.
- Although OHCOW staff recognized the significant level of support for their professional development, they expressed concern about the lack of opportunity for interchange and collaboration within the various disciplines and between them.
- OHCOW's physicians expressed the desire for more opportunities for interchange, professional development and sharing ideas on best practices and approaches, both among their physician colleagues and with OHCOW staff..
- All of OHCOW's disciplines noted the need for recruitment and succession planning as a significant component of OHCOW's leadership, staff and physicians approach retirement.
- Unions highlighted the need for training and orientation, and opportunities for mutual interchange of ideas, to best equip OHCOW staff and physicians to understand and work with vulnerable workers and with the labour movement.
- Worker representatives, along with WSIB and WSIAT representatives, highlighted the need for OHCOW's reports and other materials to be appropriate and useful for their purposes; and on the other hand, OHCOW staff and physicians expressed concerns about the need for dialogue on these issues and regarding the expectations and roles of these partners.

- During the staff consultation, significant concerns were expressed about the lack of consistency in the way activities are reported and classified and in turn how resources are allocated. This accompanied concerns about deficiencies in the OHCOW database and other components of OHCOW's information technology infrastructure.

### **OHCOW's key challenges and strengths**

Like all organizations, OHCOW faces multiple challenges, pressures and uncertainties. It also has a strong base to build from – its expert and dedicated staff, its Board of Directors, its significant local and provincial level of support and its partnerships within the prevention system and beyond.

After a period of internal focus and difficulties, OHCOW is poised to move forward. It will be vital to fully engage OHCOW's staff, Board and partners in the process as the strategic plan is implemented.

### **Revised vision and mission statements**

OHCOW's original vision and mission were strong and clear and provided much to build on. Based on the planning consultation and on the evolution of the prevention system, they have been renewed and revised, primarily to recognize a broader and partnered approach to prevention.

The overall objective is to focus our resources on the prevention system's objective of making major progress towards eliminating occupational injuries and illnesses, as well as achieving operational efficiencies and closing gaps with the WSIB designation standards.

OHCOW plays a unique dual role in the system. First, we have a substantial direct involvement in occupational injury and disease cases and clusters through our clinical services. This puts us at the front line in the detection of work-related health conditions and supports our second role, prevention.

Second, OHCOW is a vital bridge between the worker community and the prevention system. Many of OHCOW's initiatives begin with the recognition by a group of workers or their union that their workplace or sector has a serious occupational health and safety problem.

When workers and unions are informed and supported, they are able to work effectively with employers and prevention system partners towards the elimination of occupational disease and injury.

We are committed to focusing the best within OHCOW and within ourselves to finding the most effective prevention strategies, moving forward on a number of fronts simultaneously – including workplace interventions, encouraging high performance in health and safety, disability prevention and prevention of occupational diseases and musculo-skeletal disorders.

In this context, the worker community expects OHCOW to maintain our unique role while contributing strongly to prevention efforts.

OHCOW's original vision and mission have been substantially revised during the strategic planning process. The revised vision for OHCOW now includes the elimination of occupational injuries and illnesses, the detection of occupational health conditions and the promotion of the highest degree of physical, mental and social well-being for all workers.

Guided by this vision, OHCOW developed a mission statement identifying five strategies containing eight key elements. Strategic directions have been developed for each of these five strategies.

### **OHCOW's vision, mission and key strategic directions**

#### **Vision statement**

The detection, prevention and elimination of occupational injuries and illnesses, and the promotion of the highest degree of physical, mental and social well-being for all workers.

#### **Mission statement**

To protect workers and their communities from occupational injuries and illnesses, and to promote their social, mental and physical well-being through:

##### **Clinical services**

- Providing multi-disciplinary services to workers who are concerned about their occupational health and to the families of workers who fall victim to occupational disease

##### **Prevention services**

- Identifying and analyzing occupational hazards and exposures, and developing effective programs for prevention and elimination.
- Participating in prevention initiatives which address environmental or public health as well as occupational health.

##### **Research, knowledge transfer, tool development and educational services**

- Conducting and supporting participatory research and promoting its contribution to knowledge transfers and development of prevention tools and resources.

- Educating and learning from workers, workplaces and the community about occupational hazards, exposures and prevention solutions

### **Partnerships**

- Building and maintaining strong relationships with workers and unions and, wherever possible, with employers through joint health and safety committees, trades committees and health and safety representatives.
- Building and maintaining strong partnerships within the Ontario prevention system, to further our vision and mission.

### **Commitment to service excellence and to the wellbeing of our staff**

- Dedicating ourselves to the highest degree of service and respect to those we serve, and to being an exemplary healthy, safe, supportive and respectful workplace, focusing our resources on the most important priorities and operating in a cost efficient, accountable and effective way.

### **Strategic directions**

#### **1) Clinical services: Providing multi-disciplinary services to workers who are concerned about their occupational health and to the families of workers who fall victim to occupational disease**

OHCOW faces many pressures in continuing to improve its clinical services to workers. We need to continue and complete work on the 38 clusters (including 9 with over 100 cases each since 2003) which have emerged since 2000, while dealing with significant demands for involvement in new clusters and other group situations, including those stemming from the closing of many industrial workplaces in Ontario. We need to reduce and eliminate backlogs of individual cases while dealing with new incoming cases. At the same time, OHCOW needs to better link its clinical work with its prevention work. The solution is the multi-faceted approach to clinical services laid out below. Therefore we will:

- Maintain and strengthen OHCOW's capacity to provide multi-disciplinary services to workers and groups of workers.
- Work with staff, partners and clients to review existing service model and approaches, to identify best practices and ensure consistency across the organization.
- Seek the restoration of resources to existing clinics and the establishment of new clinics in Thunder Bay (for northwestern Ontario), London, the GTA, Ottawa (for eastern Ontario), with satellites in Peterborough and Sault Ste. Marie.
- Develop a plan to carry out exit health assessments and occupational history taking in Ontario workplaces which are at risk of closing down or have recently closed down.

**Background:** Currently, requests for exit health assessments and/or intake clinics emerge ad hoc from various unions. This contributes to a crisis driven environment for OHCOW and our system partners, particularly WSIB. Some unions are reluctant to bring clusters forward while OHCOW continues to struggle with the continuing workload from the major clusters which emerged in 2003 – 05. OHCOW is committed to working with our stakeholders and partners to develop a more orderly and planned approach, especially by:

- Consulting with labour partners to develop an organized multi-year approach to providing exit health assessments and occupational history taking.
- Considering this potential workload in the context of requests for intake clinics where there may be potential clusters of injury or illness and develop integrated plan including both components.
- Explore funding models with WSIB which would support the significant ongoing need for OHCOW's individual case and cluster related services.

**Background:** Preliminary analysis indicates that approximately 50% of OHCOW's current resources are directed at providing clinical services. WSIB has recognized this to a significant extent through establishment of funding from Operations Division through a services agreement. This is much appreciated. OHCOW will work with WSIB to quantify OHCOW clinical work and to review and model options for funding from Operations Division for OHCOW's clinical services.

- Explore involvement of multi-disciplinary OHCOW teams in joint return to work initiatives, in partnership with the Occupational Disability Response Team. The focus would be maximizing OHCOW's impact on improving the collective health and safety of workers in the workplace, while supporting individual workers in disability prevention and return to work. This could also include a training role for WHSC, particularly regarding ergonomics and MSD prevention.
- Strengthen the link between OHCOW's casework and its prevention work, particularly through improvements in data collection and analysis; working with WSIB and other prevention partners; and ensuring that prevention is built into future intake clinics and other case related activities.
- Strengthen capacity and accessibility to deal with vulnerable worker populations, including a specific focus on immigrant, migrant and first nations workers as well as vulnerable independent operators and temporary agency workers.

## 2) Prevention services

### a) Identifying and analyzing occupational hazards and exposures, and developing effective programs for prevention and elimination.

OHCOW has a long history of identifying and analyzing occupational hazards and exposures, and moving from there to prevention and elimination of the related injuries/illnesses. Historically, prevention interventions have tended to emerge on a regional level and on a somewhat ad hoc basis. OHCOW's Board has identified several

ways to focus OHCOW's contribution, to best leverage the strengths of our multi-disciplinary, participatory approach and strong links to workers and their unions.

Therefore we will:

- Continue and renew the emphasis on participatory approaches to prevention.
- Ensure that OHCOW services funded by WSIB are free of charge to workers and workplaces. Cost recovery will only be approved in exceptional circumstances, in consultation with the Board, where the extent of service requested by the workplace is so great that it would impair OHCOW's capacity to serve other workers and workplaces, and where the employer would ordinarily expect to pay for these services. Any cost recovery shall not impair the quality and quantity of the service to other clients. Hard copies and web versions of OHCOW tools will be free to individual workers and workplaces, with cost recovery only for multiple hard copies. The Managing Director will report quarterly on any cost recovery situations.
- Build capacity to address the full range of health and safety issues, including violence and harassment, psychosocial issues such as stress and mental illness, infectious disease and protecting worker health and safety in an emergency response.
- Identify a small number of existing or emerging high hazard exposures for special focused initiatives.
- Develop approaches to serve smaller workplaces, but with the assurance that the foundation is that workers in those workplaces are fully and freely involved in the process.

**b) Participating in prevention initiatives which address environmental or public health as well as occupational health.**

Many of the hazardous exposures which contribute to occupational diseases are present in the broader environment as well as the workplace. Effective prevention and elimination strategies will often involve partnerships with environmental and/or public health organizations. We will:

- Develop consistent approaches to situations with environmental or public health dimensions, with OHCOW's primary focus remaining on the occupational dimension.
- Participate in the development of integrated prevention strategies, particularly around occupational disease.
- Explore related partnerships with public sector partners outside the prevention system. .

**3) Research, knowledge transfer, tool development and educational services**

**a) Conducting and supporting participatory research and promoting its contribution to knowledge transfers and development of prevention tools and resources.**

OHCOW has conducted or supported very extensive research efforts over the past two decades. While some has been formal, sometimes supported by research grants, most has been participatory and workplace based. A major research workshop hosted by OHCOW in April 2008 for the worker community identified major challenges in linking research to knowledge transfer and to the development of prevention tools and resources. Unfortunately, many innovative research and tool development projects have been carried out with little or no impact beyond the immediate workplace. OHCOW's Board placed a high priority on improving these links and bringing research findings into practical use in workplaces. We will:

- Review OHCOW's approach to research, to identify best practices and maximize the participatory focus and related positive outcomes in workplaces.
- Develop a more systematic and consistent link between OHCOW's case related and prevention activities and research objectives and outcomes. Include as a high priority the development of a more robust database which can better support research.
- Leverage research findings and outcomes to identify emerging occupational health trends and related prevention priorities, and to develop prevention tools and resources which can be used in all types of workplaces and by vulnerable workers. Based on its unique model of multi-disciplinary teams, play a leading role within the prevention system in tool development, ensuring that the tools are user-tested in workplaces and are useful and accessible to vulnerable workers and small business as well as larger ones.
- Contribute to the development of research capacity within the union and worker community.
- Explore funding and support for occupational health research from other partners, such as the health care system.
- Develop an effective approach to communicating research activities and findings.

**b) Educating and learning from workers, workplaces and the community about occupational hazards, exposures and prevention solutions**

Because of its strong base in the worker community and in local communities where its clinics are located, OHCOW has played a significant role in workplace and community education on occupational hazards, exposures and solutions. These efforts have tended to develop from local priorities rather than on a provincial level. OHCOW's Board identified the need to maximize OHCOW's impact by better focus and planning of its educational activities. The Board also identified the need to get more public attention to successful prevention interventions. We will:

- Formalize OHCOW's communications strategy and integrate communications into all key activities

- Strengthen capacity for communications, particularly through the website and related mechanisms, including a strong focus on how OHCOW's involvement has made a positive difference in workplace health and safety.
- Work with key partners to strengthen OHCOW's involvement in worker and union community educational initiatives.

#### 4) Partnerships

**a) Building and maintaining strong relationships with workers and unions and, wherever possible, with employers through joint health and safety committees, trades committees and health and safety representatives.**

OHCOW has very strong links with workers and their unions, but there is no comprehensive overall strategic framework to allow identification of priorities and ensure application of resources to initiatives which will have greatest impact. Currently, injury/illness detection and prevention projects are developed somewhat ad hoc, often on a local level, and sometimes well after the emergence of clusters of significant health conditions. We will:

- Ensure broad, comprehensive representation of the labour movement on the OHCOW Board of Directors.
- Strengthen OHCOW's capacity and resources to work on a strategic, province-wide level with unions on key OHS concerns. This includes ensuring an OHCOW link with labour councils and presence at major labour conferences and events.
- Review the OHCOW approach to partnering with unions, to identify best practices and protocols, and implement these on a consistent basis in the organization.

**b) Building and maintaining strong partnerships within the Ontario prevention system, to further our vision and mission.**

OHCOW has been playing a major role in 2007/2008 helping to strengthen system coordination and alignment. Most important has been OHCOW's role in leading the OHSCO Performance Measures initiative and developing proposed approaches to occupational disease prevention. OHCOW has also committed to a collaborative approach with key system partners in responding to sensitive situations. 2009 will be a very important year in strengthening system coordination. We will:

- Develop a more systematic OHCOW approach to its dual role with the worker community and prevention system, including the identification of best practices and learning from situations which have had good outcomes. This includes participation in the prevention system's intervention strategy for the elimination of occupational injury and disease, working towards outcomes and using performance measures viewed as valid by the worker and labour community.

- Support efforts to identify and recognize workplace parties with truly good health and safety programs, by continuing dialogue with WSIB and partners on accreditation and other high performance strategies. OHCOW's approach will reflect our commitment to performance measures which recognize true health and safety performance. As part of this, OHCOW will review and evaluate the success of its own workplace interventions, to identify those which have led to sustained improvements in health and safety.
- Strengthen OHCOW's partnership with the WHSC and ODRT, focusing on how the three organizations can complement each others' roles and provide comprehensive services to workplaces and work cooperatively in labour and community educational initiatives.
- Review OHCOW's current partnerships with other HSAs and identify which are most strategic in terms of the strongest impact on worker health and safety. Include partnerships based around professional disciplines within OHCOW and the HSAs (such as ergonomists, hygienists, nurses and physicians).
- Continue to play a lead role around system performance measures, information sharing and occupational disease prevention.

**5) Commitment to service excellence and to the wellbeing of our staff: Dedicating ourselves to the highest degree of service and respect to those we serve, and to being an exemplary healthy, safe, supportive and respectful workplace,, focusing our resources on the most important priorities and operating in a cost efficient, accountable and effective way.**

OHCOW's Board confirmed that OHCOW itself must walk the talk externally in terms of the way we serve our clients and internally in the way we function as an organization and work with our own staff. We will:

- Develop an exemplary approach and standard for OHCOW's services to workers, unions and workplaces, including in particular respect and empathy for the situation faced by the most vulnerable workers and their families. All WSIB funding shall be used for free services to OHCOW clients.
- Develop a comprehensive human resources strategy, including a focus on organizational and staff wellness and health and safety; a collaborative relationship with staff; employment and pay equity; a learning and career development plan; and a recruitment and succession plan.
- Review the multi-disciplinary team approach, in collaboration with staff, identifying best practices and ensuring consistency across the organization.
- Develop a specific plan for OHCOW's physicians, taking into account the different nature of their relationship with the organization, to strengthen their vital role in OHCOW's team approach and support them in their work and career development.
- Foster an environment of information sharing and collaboration within and between OHCOW's disciplines.

- Partner with worker representatives, WSIB and WSIAT to identify best practices and improve mutual understanding of the best role for OHCOW in the workers' compensation system.
- Review OHCOW's information technology challenges and issues and develop a comprehensive IT plan, including the database, standardizing hardware, bandwidth, and website capacity.
- Review organizational reporting and accountability issues, to ensure consistency, comparability and the capacity to determine that resources are being allocated appropriately.

### **Implementing this plan**

The test of any plan is whether it can be implemented, in an ever changing environment and with limited financial resources. This means that each component of the plan will have to be examined in terms of priority and timing. The resource implications will be the subject of discussions with the WSIB and other partners during the summer and fall of 2008. Preparatory steps for implementation will take place in the second half of 2008, with major implementation steps in the operational plan for 2009 and further progress in 2010 and 2011. While all strategic plans are subject to ongoing review, a formal review will take place during 2010, to allow a new strategic plan to be prepared by mid-2011.