



November 20, 2019

The Honourable Christine Elliott
Deputy Premier and Minister of Health and Long-Term Care
10th Floor, Hepburn Block
80 Grosvenor Street
Toronto, ON M7A 2C4

Mr. Jim Pine
Special Adviser, Public Health Modernization
c/o Minister of Health
10th Flr, 80 Grosvenor St,
Toronto, ON M7A 2C4

Dear Minister Elliott and Mr. Pine:

Re: Public Health Modernization

During the Association of Local Public Health Agencies meetings held November 6 & 7, 2019 in Toronto, representatives from the Ministry of Health indicated that aspects of the original direction provided to health units on April 11, 2019 regarding the creation of 10 regional public health entities have now been paused. Given this, I am writing on behalf of the Board of Health for the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit to recommend that the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (SMDHU) remain as an independent health unit operating within its current boundaries and under its current governance structure.

It should be noted that this position for the Board is a change from its previously stated position calling on the province to maintain SMDHU intact as it merges with public health services in York Region. The rationale for the prior position was based on a very strong desire to avoid services in Simcoe and Muskoka being divided, and on the assumption at the time (immediately following the release of the April budget and verbal communication from Ministry of Health staff) that a merger would not be avoidable. However, with the present opportunity to consider our future with a fresh look, this current position is based on what it would deem to be actually best for the provision of public health services in Simcoe Muskoka.

On April 1, 2005 SMDHU was formed through the dissolution of the former Muskoka-Parry Sound Health Unit and the Muskoka District operations merged with the former Simcoe County District Health Unit operations and the Parry Sound District operations merged with the former North Bay & District Health Unit. The Board and staff have worked very hard since the inception of SMDHU (a merger prompted by the province) to create a cohesive public health agency that is highly successful in fulfilling its mandate. Extensive work and extraordinary merger costs were invested in the newly formed health unit.

A strong and stable governance structure currently exists through the Board of Health being represented by 14 members including four elected representatives from the County of Simcoe, two elected representatives from the District of Muskoka, two elected representatives from the

□ **Barrie:**
15 Spurling Drive
Barrie, ON
L4M 6K9
705-721-7520
FAX: 705-721-1495

□ **Collingwood:**
280 Pretty River Pkwy.
Collingwood, ON
L9Y 4J5
705-445-0804
FAX: 705-445-6498

□ **Cookstown:**
2-25 King Street S.
Cookstown, ON
L0L 1L0
705-458-1103
FAX: 705-458-0105

□ **Gravenhurst:**
2-5 Pineridge Gate
Gravenhurst, ON
P1P 1Z3
705-684-9090
FAX: 705-684-9887

□ **Huntsville:**
34 Chaffey St.
Huntsville, ON
P1H 1K1
705-789-8813
FAX: 705-789-7245

□ **Midland:**
A-925 Hugel Ave.
Midland, ON
L4R 1X8
705-526-9324
FAX: 705-526-1513

□ **Orillia:**
120-169 Front St. S.
Orillia, ON
L3V 4S8
705-325-9565
FAX: 705-325-2091

City of Barrie, one elected representative from the City of Orillia, and currently five appointees made up of citizens appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council, through the Provincial Appointments Secretariat. Strong by-laws and policies that clearly articulate the governing, financial, operational, oversight and statutory responsibilities of the Board of Health exists.

SMDHU believes the financial stability currently exists and it is fiscally responsible to keep the health unit in the municipalities that are funding it with the levy received via County of Simcoe, District of Muskoka, City of Barrie and City of Orillia. If SMDHU is required to merge with a smaller health unit that will have implications for the current SMDHU subsidizing the smaller health unit; and merging with a larger health unit will require that health unit to subsidize the current SMDHU. Any cost efficiencies that SMDHU is currently putting in place will need to be spent in order to bring together a new entity.

Currently, the geographic boundary of SMDHU covers 8,800 square kilometers of land area. According to the 2016 Census, 540,249 people, or 61 people per square kilometer, were living in the service area of the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit. This included 479,650 living in Simcoe County and 60,599 living in the District of Muskoka. The current geographic area for Simcoe Muskoka is large enough to remain as a distinct entity. This population size is consistent with evidence demonstrating the ideal population size to realize public health outcomes serves a population of about 500,000.

A large, stable and skilled workforce exists within SMDHU. There are currently 370 employees which allows for several disciplines to be working within the health unit and specific expertise to be drawn upon. Recruitment and retention of employees has not been a barrier to having a stable workforce. Employees have access to ongoing skill development.

Extensive work with key partners in the local community including municipalities, school boards, and community agencies regarding the delivery of our public health mandate reflects a key strategic priority.

A strong organizational culture exists and it has taken years to develop a new culture within the current organization that will be impacted if a new entity is created. SMDHU is recognized as a learning organization, supports evidence-informed decision making and ensures accountability and continuous quality improvement initiatives ongoing. There is a history of successful accreditation through the former Ontario Council of Community Health Accreditation (OCCHA) reflecting a strong policy foundation within the health unit.

Overall, across the province in Ontario, there may be smaller health units that may benefit from forming new entities to achieve the public health functions described in the Ontario Public Health Standards and impact positively on population health status. They may be experiencing challenges with recruitment, capacity, financial stability, and governance that can be alleviated by becoming a new public health entity. SMDHU is achieving its mandate very well in its current state.

We look forward to participating in the upcoming consultations. We commend this approach and welcome the opportunity to participate in this engagement. As the province proceeds with its

modernization of health care and public health, the Board of Health and staff for the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit are ready to be a partner, providing our insights and expertise to bring forward all that is essential within public health.

Thank you for considering our recommendations.

Sincerely,

ORIGINAL Signed By:

Anita Dubeau
Chair, Board of Health

AD:CS:cm

cc: Association of Local Public Health Agencies
Ontario Public Health Association
Boards of Health for York Region, Sudbury, North Bay, Parry Sound, Algoma,
Porcupine, Timiskaming, and Renfrew
Municipal Councils of Simcoe Muskoka
Members of Parliament in Simcoe Muskoka
Members of Provincial Parliament in Simcoe Muskoka
Central Local Health Integration Network
North Simcoe Muskoka Local Health Integration Network