

April 18, 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

Dear Minister Elliott:

Re: The Public Health System and the 2019 Ontario Provincial Budget:

We are writing to express the views of the Board of Health for the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit regarding the 2019 Ontario Provincial Budget and its implications for the public health system. Certainly the budget speaks of the transformation of the public health system in the immediate future, with a consolidation of health units within 10 regional public health entities, a change in the funding arrangement between the province and the municipalities, and a large reduction in provincial funding (\$200 million by 2021-2022). It is the Board's understanding that these changes are being pursued to achieve efficiencies and increased responsiveness to local public health needs, working with municipalities and other health care agencies.

The mandate of public health puts people first by working with the entire population to prevent disease, and to protect and promote health. Public health protects what matters most, saving thousands of lives and billions of dollars in health care costs. The public health approach manifests in a wide range of services including (but certainly not limited to) the following:

- the provision of vaccines (to protect children from what were once universally common infectious diseases such as measles and whooping cough and are now rare due to our vaccination program),
- the response to outbreaks (such as SARS in 2003, and influenza outbreaks in health care facilities each year),
- the inspection of food provided in restaurants and in health care and educational facilities (to prevent foodborne outbreaks of disease),
- ensuring safe drinking water (preventing community-wide outbreaks, such as what happened in 2000 in Walkerton),
- tobacco control,
- home visits to support the health of newborn children in at risk homes (the Healthy Babies Healthy Children Program),
- enhancing infant health through the promotion of breastfeeding,
- mental health promotion in schools,

☐ **Barrie:**
15 Sperling 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:**
B-865 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

- helping to guide municipalities address changes in cannabis legislation,
- and working with municipalities in their preparation and response to community emergencies (such as the influenza pandemic of 2009).

The province's commitment to enhance the oral health work of public health with \$90 million for low income seniors is commendable and appreciated.

The work of public health is inherently cost effective, with an excellent return on investment, and is essential for the province to achieve its goal of ending hallway medicine. Funding for public health is a sound investment in support of the health and wellbeing of the people.

From today's teleconference with Dr. David Williams we learned details of the province's decision to change the funding formula between the province and the municipalities effective April 1, 2019. The Board asks that the provincial government reconsider the size of the reduction in funding cited in the provincial budget, as this will challenge our ability to continue to fully provide these cost-effective and essential services. We appreciate from Dr. William's teleconference that the new public health entities will have independent boards of health with strong municipal and provincial representation, seeking a strong municipal relationship; we commend this.

We also appreciate from Dr. William's teleconference today that the province will proceed very shortly (starting next week) with consultation with individual boards of health and health units regarding the transition details to be implemented. 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 to the regional public health entity to come in Central Ontario. We are prepared to join with our neighbouring health units, our local municipalities, our school boards, and our partner agencies within and outside of health care to build a new public health entity to achieve excellence in public health.

Sincerely,

ORIGINAL Signed By:

Anita Dubeau
Chair, Board of Health

ORIGINAL Signed By:

Charles Gardner, MD, CCFP, MHSc, FRCPC
Medical Officer of Health

CG:cm

Cc: Association of Local Public Health Agencies
Mayor and Council of Simcoe and Muskoka

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