

**January 18, 2024**

The Honourable Chrystia Freeland  
Minister of Finance and Deputy Prime Minister of Canada  
House of Commons  
Parliament Buildings  
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6

**Re: 2024 Federal Budget Submission**

Dear Minister Freeland,

Local public health agencies across Canada provide critical services to protect and promote the health of their communities. However, these services are strained. Between 2016 and 2021, the number of recent immigrants to Middlesex-London increased by nearly 70%, from 11,595 in 2016 to 19,685 in 2021 (an increase of 8,090). The Middlesex-London Health Unit (MLHU) has seen an associated increase in demand for services, specifically those provided by the Vaccine Preventable Disease (VPD), Infectious Disease Control (IDC), and Healthy Babies Healthy Children (HBHC) teams.

The Middlesex-London Board of Health would like to highlight the following for your consideration when building the 2024 Federal Budget, specifically advocating for increased funding to support local public health services provided to newcomers:

- A high proportion of individuals newly arrived in Canada may be susceptible to vaccine preventable diseases because of a lack of effective immunization programs in their country of origin. Immunization of persons new to Canada is often challenging because immunization records may not exist; records may be difficult to interpret because of language barriers; and immunization schedules and vaccines may differ from those used in Canada. Additional funding for enhanced nursing and program administrative resources is required to meet the increased demands on the VPD team.
- As part of the immigration process, newcomers are required to complete an Immigration Medical Examination (IME). If there are any abnormalities associated with the IME chest x-ray, public health staff on the Infectious Disease Control team will review the examination and conduct a medical history interview and symptom assessment. The 70% increase in recent immigrants to the London area has had an impact on the volumes of suspected and active tuberculosis (TB) cases, requiring follow up, with the number of active TB cases more than tripling since 2016, up from 8 per year to 23 by 2021. Each TB case requires very intensive investigation, requiring 50 hours of staff time. The number of new referrals has increased by 28% over the same five years, from 76 in 2016 to 273 in 2022. Additional funding for enhanced nursing resources is required to meet the increased demands on the IDC team.
- The HBHC program is designed to help children in Ontario have a healthy start in life. To identify families that may benefit from the program, a screening tool is used which takes into account certain risk factors for less-than-optimal development. The HBHC screening tool includes a question on whether infants and families need newcomer support. Infants and families need newcomer support if the mother is new to Canada, less than 5 years living in Canada, who lacks social supports, or is experiencing social isolation. The percent of infants screened with families in need of newcomer support has been significantly higher for Middlesex-London compared to Ontario. For example, in 2022 Middlesex-London saw demand of 10.1%, compared with 3.7% in the rest of the province. Since 2015, the need for newcomer supports have increased by 3%, corresponding to approximately 100 more families requiring this service between 2015 and 2023. Additional funding for enhanced nursing resources is required to meet the increased demands on the HBHC team.

On behalf of the Middlesex-London Board of Health, thank you for providing an opportunity for organizations to provide a submission to the Federal Government in building the 2024 Budget.

Sincerely,

**2024 BOARD CHAIR**  
Board Chair

Dr. Alex Summers MD, MPH, CCFP, FRCPC  
Medical Officer of Health

Emily Williams BScN, RN, MBA, CHE  
Chief Executive Officer