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July 20, 2018

The Honourable Christine Elliott
Minister of Health and Long-Term Care
238 Wellington Street East
Suite 203
Aurora, ON
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Dear Minister Elliott,

On behalf of the Board of Health of the Middlesex-London Health Unit, congratulations on your appointment as the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. We look forward to our continued partnership with the Ontario Government as we work together to tackle complex issues of public health concern.

Even though great gains have been made in tobacco control and the rate of smoking is declining, tobacco remains the leading cause of preventable disease and death in the province of Ontario. According to the [Canadian Substance Use Costs and Harms Study](#) released in June 2018, substance use costs the Canadian economy \$38.4 billion, or almost \$1,100 for every person in Canada, with tobacco use alone contributing to 31.2% (\$12.0 billion) of these costs, second only to alcohol (\$14.6 billion or 38.1%).

The healthcare burden associated with tobacco remains high; in 2014, substance use-related healthcare costs amounted to \$11.1 billion in Canada, with tobacco use contributing to 53.1% (\$5.9 billion) of these costs. The Middlesex-London Health Unit and its Board of Health looks forward to working under the leadership of the Ontario Government to address the harms from tobacco use and the growing use, availability and promotion of other inhaled products and other emerging nicotine products, like cannabis, heat-not-burn tobacco, shisha and electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes or vapour products).

At its July 19th meeting, the Board of Health reconfirmed its commitment to tobacco control as a top public health priority. The Board of Health understands that the provincial government wishes to re-examine the evidence related to vaping as a cessation tool, and that the enactment of the *Smoke-Free Ontario Act 2017* (*SFOA 2017*) has been suspended. Further research is needed to fully understand the impacts of e-cigarettes on tobacco use initiation and smoking cessation, and the health impacts from second-hand exposure. It is critical that any policy framework that allows vaping as a cessation tool include safeguards to prevent youth uptake.

Research has confirmed that that use among youth of products such as e-cigarettes increases the likelihood of youth smoking tobacco, potentially leading to a lifetime of smoking cigarettes, with all of the risk that this entails. Legislation that prohibits the use of vaping products in the same public locations where smoking tobacco is already restricted can help reduce this risk.

Regardless of any changes to vaping provisions, other aspects of *SFOA 2017* are important and worthy of note. The consolidation of the Electronic Cigarettes Act with the Smoke-Free Ontario Act creates the legislative framework that will be a crucial tool for any tobacco control strategy. The

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prohibition of displays included in the legislation is also important, with research evidence indicating that such measures help reduce youth initiation.

The Board of Health of the Middlesex-London Health Unit remains committed to working in partnership with the Ontario Government to tackle the burden of tobacco and nicotine addiction. The public health community and its institutions and agencies, including local public health agencies, the seven Tobacco Control Area Networks, Public Health Ontario, the Ontario Tobacco Research Unit, and the non-governmental organizations, have expertise and institutional history that will be crucial during current and future reviews of tobacco control strategy development.

The public health community looks forward to the opportunity to share their expertise and experience, working together under the leadership of the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, to create a healthier, more productive population with enhanced quality of life and reduced health care costs.

Sincerely,

Joanne Vanderheyden, Chair
Middlesex-London Board of Health

cc by email: Premier Doug Ford
MPP Teresa Armstrong
MPP Terence Kernaghan
MPP Monte McNaughton
MPP Peggy Sattler
MPP Jeff Yurek
Helen Angus, Deputy Minister, Health and Long-Term Care
Sharon Lee Smith, Associate Deputy Minister, Policy and Transformation
Roselle Martino, Assistant Deputy Minister, Population and Public Health Division
Dr. David Williams, Chief Medical Officer of Health
The Association of Local Public Health Agencies
Boards of Health of Ontario public health units

Attachment: Report No. 048-18 "*Provincial Government Suspends the Enactment of the Smoke-Free Ontario Act 2017*"