

May 19, 2023

The Honourable Sylvia Jones
Deputy Premier of Ontario
Minister of Health
sylvia.jones@ontario.ca

Re: Peterborough Public Health 2024 Budget

Dear Minister Jones:

The PPH Board of Health (BOH) recently met with our Members of Provincial Parliament and representatives from the City of Peterborough, the County of Peterborough, Curve Lake First Nation, and Hiawatha First Nation to discuss our shared concerns surrounding the financial challenges facing public health.

We recognize that it is still early in the budget process, and that the 2023 provincial budget implementation is still progressing. However, because of the breadth of uncertainties and financial risks facing public health in our region, we wanted the opportunity to discuss our current and forthcoming challenges. We are grateful for the engagement of MPPs Piccini, Scott and Smith, and appreciate their thoughtful reflections and willingness to follow up on concerns from local funders.

The BOH is proud to work with provincial and local funding partners to deliver public health services to our region. The provincial role in public health funding has been essential throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, and we are appreciative of the support we have received from your Government through one-time extraordinary funding to ensure the most effective response possible.

From previous communication from PPH, and other local public health agencies, you will likely be aware that there are longstanding challenges with the sustainability of public health funding in Ontario. PPH has worked to maximize efficiencies in operations, and for years now has seen funding agreements fall short of inflationary increases. We have now reached a point where we cannot continue to deliver critical public health services with the funding we receive.

There are three significant financial concerns facing public health in 2024:

1. PPH, like other sectors, must account for cost increasing at an average rate of 2-3% per year just to maintain the same level of programming. In 2023, the approved PPH cost-shared budget increased by 1.94%, as we continue to be careful stewards of public funds, while maintaining needed services. Yet provincial funding increases have not kept pace. Will your government ensure adequate continued base funding increases to, at minimum, maintain existing service levels?
2. COVID-19 funding has been extended for 2023; however, we are uncertain whether this will continue beyond the current year. This uncertainty undermines our ability to retain the human health resources required to maintain a proportionate response to the ongoing threat of COVID-19. It also further erodes our ability to ensure readiness for future threats to population health, as has been prioritized

by Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health in his [2022 Annual Report](#). Will your government continue to ensure PPH is funded at a level to adequately maintain a proportionate COVID-19 contact tracing and vaccination response, and ensure readiness for future threats to population health?

3. The Province of Ontario moved from a 75/25 to a 70/30 funding split; however, mitigation funding has delayed this download to municipalities. Will your government reverse the decision to move to a 70/30 funding split and maintain that additional contribution to public health? If not, will you consider supporting phasing this in over multiple years to ensure that this download can be effectively managed by local funders?

We continue to value our partnership with the Province of Ontario on advancing public health issues in this community. The COVID-19 pandemic and the aforementioned Ontario CMOH 2022 Annual Report have highlighted the need to ensure the stability of public health funding for continued response to COVID-19 and future health threats, which may be just around the corner. The work of public health extends further to improving the health and prosperity of our community.

In the City, County, Curve Lake First Nation and Hiawatha First Nation, further loss of public health programs will mean that businesses cannot operate safely, people cannot access important public health services, and health and economic development throughout our region will suffer. Without addressing these acute funding issues our community may experience:

- Diminished capacity to respond to and manage disease outbreaks in Long-Term Care, risking the lives of elderly and medically fragile residents;
- Negative economic consequences for over 1,500 local businesses and significant risks to public safety as food premises and small drinking water systems are left uninspected or face delayed openings;
- Reduced ability to vaccinate school-aged children against infectious diseases and screen for urgent oral health issues, undermining lifelong health and opportunities for future employment.

The pandemic has taught us that healthy communities and economies cannot exist without healthy people. With all that we have learned over the past three years, we seek your support and investment to ensure a strengthened and resilient public health system without creating undue strain on local funders.

We look forward to hearing from you.

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Original signed by

Councillor Kathryn Wilson
Chair, Board of Health

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cc: The Hon. Doug Ford, Premier of Ontario
Local Councils
Local MPPs
The Association of Local Public Health Agencies
Ontario Boards of Health