

September 26, 2023

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

Re: Section 50 Agreements

Dear Minister Jones:

With the August 22, 2023 provincial announcement to refine and clarify the roles of local boards of health, and the opportunity to voluntarily merge local public health agencies, Peterborough Public Health (PPH) would like to request the system protect and maintain requirement for boards of health to foster and create meaningful relationships with Indigenous Peoples.

Meaningful engagement with Indigenous Peoples and their communities is essential to addressing health inequities. This is acknowledged in the 2018 Ontario Public Health Standards where the Health Equity Standard specifically requires all boards of health to build relationships with Indigenous communities, organizations and First Nations and ensure it is done in a culturally safe way.¹ More recently, arising from post-pandemic evidence, this has been further reinforced within reports from both the Ontario Chief Medical Officer² of Health and Canada's Chief Public Health Officer.³

Our local experience indicates that statutory requirements and provincial standards make a difference. PPH enjoys formal relationships with Hiawatha First Nation and Curve Lake First Nation, as a result of Section 50 agreements in place since 1995. Over the last ten years we have sought to strengthen our relationship with Indigenous Peoples through the establishment of an Indigenous Health Advisory Circle that welcomes participation by the broader Indigenous community to ensure we are attending to all interests and needs regardless of where people reside within the region.

Through these actions, PPH has experienced growth in trust and partnership, not only with the two First Nation communities but also with the urban Indigenous community. But there is more work to be done and we have acknowledged this work in our current Strategic Plan.⁴

Therefore, in view of the Ministry of Health's current goal to deliver more equitable health outcomes, PPH would like to recommend that the Ministry of Health:

1. Ensure continued opportunity for Section 50 agreements within the Health Promotion and Protection Act;
2. Seek to revise the HPPA to be inclusive of urban Indigenous peoples and their health needs under that Act so they have equal opportunities to help shape board of health decision-making; and
3. Ensure the review and revisions of the Ontario Public Health Standards maintains directives for engagement with Indigenous Peoples.

As we look towards a future where Indigenous Peoples experience greater health equity, we urge the Provincial Government to continue to support boards of health so that they are able to act as better allies with Indigenous communities and amplify their voices.

Miigwech,

Original signed by

Councillor Kathryn Wilson
Chair, Board of Health

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cc: Local MPPs
Dr. Kieran Moore, Ontario Chief Medical Officer of Health
The Association of Local Public Health Agencies
Ontario Boards of Health

References

1. [Ontario Public Health Standards, 2021](#)
2. [Being Ready: 2022 Annual Report of the Chief Medical Officer of Health of the Legislature of Ontario, 2022](#)
3. [Principles for Engaging with First Nations, Inuit and Metis: Chief Public Health Officer Health Professional Forum, 2023](#)
4. [Strategic Plan 2022-2025: Peterborough Public Health](#)