

**Speaking Remarks for Christine Elliott, Deputy Premier and Minister of Health
Association of Municipalities of Ontario Conference
August 19, 2019**

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Good morning, everyone.

It's a pleasure to be back in Ottawa this week. I've already had the chance to stop and meet so many friendly faces – and I look forward to continuing to do so over the next two days.

As Ontario's Minister of Health, I am driven by a relentless commitment to strengthen our province's health care system.

Because the people of Ontario deserve the peace of mind that the system is going to be there for them when they need it – now and in the future.

Indeed, access to publicly-funded health care is fundamental to our shared understanding of what it means to be an Ontarian and a Canadian.

But factors are threatening the long-term sustainability of our system – not the least of which includes an increasingly aging population with complex care needs.

Simply put, the future of the health care system we cherish and expect is at risk. We must make changes to ensure that we have a strong, fully accessible system for our children and grandchildren.

I take that responsibility very seriously.

Our system is in need of transformational change. And that's why I'm proud to report that our government is delivering this change with our plan to build a modern, connected and sustainable public health care system.

Over the past year, we have made great progress on our promise to build a connected, integrated, coordinated system of care – centred around the patient.

With the creation of Ontario Health, the province's new central health agency, and the work that's been accomplished toward establishing the first wave of local Ontario Health Teams to serve our communities, we have made great strides, together, toward delivering on that promise.

And I want to emphasize that these teams will be based in and driven by local communities. That's the only way we can truly deliver patient-centred care.

So as part of this plan, we must also consider how best to deliver public health – a central component of community health care – in a way that is resilient, efficient, nimble, and modern...

...in a way that meets the evolving health needs and priorities of Ontario's families.

Within the context of this broader and desperately needed health transformation, we have an opportunity to modernize and strengthen the role of public health, and to consider how it is connected to our communities.

As you know, several months ago our government announced our plans to update the way that public health is structured in Ontario.

And as you also know, our proposed approach inspired widespread and spirited discussion.

I want to be clear today – we are a government that listens.

In fact, my ministry has been working diligently with AMO, the City of Toronto, and with the Association of Local Public Health Agencies at technical tables since April to discuss this important work.

We heard about the need for more time – not only to accommodate changes to cost-sharing arrangements, but also to ensure a seamless transition to new regional entities.

And we heard about the need to consult more broadly.

That's why Premier Ford made a clear commitment to pause any changes to the funding models for 2019.

We are maintaining the status quo for this year.

Doing so will offer municipalities the time you need to find ways to support our shared objective of a more sustainable public health sector.

Our goal is to offer municipalities increased stability as we begin to transition to updated funding models.

So I want to provide clarity on where we are headed with respect to these updated models.

I want to start by assuring everyone here today that future changes will build in protections for municipal budgets.

All municipal budgets.

And that all budgets will be treated the same.

Starting January 1, 2020, all municipalities will transition to a 70-30 cost sharing funding model.

70 province. 30 municipality.

In the first year, no public health unit will experience an increase over 10 per cent of current public health costs as a result of this cost-sharing change. That's the protection we have built in to ease the transition.

We recognize that there are municipalities that already contribute 30 per cent or more. These municipalities won't experience any impact.

Now, our government remains as committed as ever to strengthening public health in Ontario.

So while the way in which we are implementing our plan to strengthen public health has changed, one thing has not...

The need to do so.

Though the sector is filled with dedicated and experienced professionals who are fully committed to serving the people of Ontario, there continues to be a clear need to modernize and update our public health sector.

In 2017, the Auditor General reported that public health units are poorly coordinated and duplicating work.

And that – since 2014 – about one-third of public health units have undertaken research on a number of common topics.

This includes research on topics like sugar-sweetened beverages, energy drinks, e-cigarettes and alcohol.

We don't question the need for research on important public health topics.

But we do question the need to invest taxpayer dollars to produce multiple reports on the same topic.

The Auditor General also reported that public health services are delivered inconsistently across the province.

This is not fair or equitable for the people of Ontario.

People need to know that the services offered by their public health unit are available to them, no matter where they live in the province.

Finally, absent size and scope, some of our public health units struggle to recruit and retain the health care professionals they need to deliver high-quality services.

Something needs to be done. The status quo isn't an option.

And it's important that we do this right.

That's why our government will soon launch renewed consultation with municipalities and our partners in public health.

This will be in addition to the work that's being done at our already-established technical tables.

Through this consultation process, we will ensure that sufficient time is provided for thoughtful dialogue and implementation planning.

I am also pleased to announce today that this next phase of engagement will be supported by an expert advisor, dedicated to this work

Over the next few weeks, we will work with this advisor, with input from AMO, to begin this consultation, which we expect to launch this fall.

This next phase of engagement will be defined by openness and transparency, anchored by the release of a discussion paper.

Among other aspects of the new regional entities, this paper will outline our proposals for boundaries for the new regional public health entities.

These proposals are intended to help guide these consultations. They should in no way be considered final or inflexible.

I also want to take a moment to share with you that the advisor will also support consultations on emergency health services.

We heard your concerns about the proposed changes to land ambulance.

We responded to those concerns by announcing that in-year cost sharing for those services will be maintained.

And I am here to tell you today that Ontario will not be reducing funding to land ambulance services.

In fact, municipalities will receive on average nearly four per cent more in funding for the 2019 calendar year, and can expect continued growth for 2020.

The funding letters will be sent imminently.

We will continue to work with you to ensure that the modernization of programs and services is informed by your advice and your communities' daily realities.

This means prioritizing dispatch technology modernization and the piloting of new patient care models for select 911 patients, while slowing down and consulting on how the integration of communication centres and emergency health services can be done more effectively.

Our government is building a health care system for the people of Ontario.

We are building a modern, sustainable and integrated health care system that starts and ends with the patient.

Modernizing our public health sector and our emergency health services are an important part of our plan.

Because of the important work we are doing today, Ontarians can rest assured that there will be a sustainable health care system for them when and where they need it.

Thank you. I'd be happy to take your questions.

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