

Sent by e-mail to: sylvia.jones@ontario.ca

February 29, 2024

The Honourable Sylvia Jones
Minister of Health
College Park
777 Bay Street, 5th Floor
Toronto, Ontario M7A 2J3

Dear Minister Jones,

Municipal governments provide critical services that are central to Ontario's economy and quality of life, investing almost \$65 billion annually into important public services and infrastructure, including health services and programs that support the social determinants of health. AMO has called on Premier Ford, through our pre-budget submission, to work together with municipal governments to undertake a social and economic prosperity review. This review is crucially important for both municipal and provincial governments to best serve the health of our communities and residents.

AMO is ready to work with the Ministry of Health to improve the health of our communities. There are persistent health challenges facing municipal governments that require urgent action. We are encouraged by the new \$3.1 billion agreement between the federal and provincial governments to improve health care in Ontario. This is an important opportunity to address some of the most pressing health challenges in Ontario communities. AMO and our members are ready to work with you to ensure these investments meet the needs of our communities.

Access to Health Services

Communities across Ontario are experiencing growing challenges in accessing health care services, particularly in rural and northern locations. It has become increasingly challenging to attract and retain an adequate workforce in municipal health services, as well as the broader health sector. We are encouraged by recent announcements to grow the health care workforce through training, education, and other initiatives. However, more work is needed to coordinate access to services across the province.

A plan for a robust health care workforce developed through a provincial, sector-wide health human resources strategy would significantly improve access to health services across the province. This comprehensive strategy will help to align initiatives across the sector to ensure all communities are served by a strong health care workforce.

AMO recommends that the Province consider the themes of compensation; mental health and well-being; diversity, equity and inclusion; immigration; education and training; human resources planning tools; return to work incentives; and regional disparities as part of this strategy. We also recommend that the Province convene a table of health experts with municipal representation to advise on the development and implementation of a sector-wide health human resources strategy.

Public Health

AMO recognizes the need for investment to enhance public health service delivery and population health outcomes. The 1% base funding increase over three years is challenging in the face of inflation and the demand for services. It is necessary to fund public health appropriately, especially as public health units are adapting to the challenges of resuming services after the pandemic and undergoing the voluntary mergers process. AMO appreciates our collaboration with the Ministry on public health matters and we hope to continue this work through involvement in upcoming discussions around public health funding.

AMO is supportive of voluntary mergers with incentives, as requested through the modernization consultation process in 2020. We reiterate that the process for voluntary mergers should be consistent with the principles outlined in our December 11th, 2023, letter. We encourage the Province to continue to proactively communicate clarifications and the Ministry's commitment to these principles throughout the process. We look forward to ongoing collaboration with your Ministry on this topic and for continued opportunities for municipal engagement.

Ontario Health Teams (OHTs)

Municipal governments contribute \$2.23 billion to health services in addition to significant contributions to the social determinants of health through other municipal services. Municipal participation on OHTs has a great potential to improve health outcomes and provide valuable insights on the needs of the community.

AMO appreciates the guidance provided to OHTs in Ontario Health Teams – The Path Forward that has supported accountability and consistency within OHTs. However, AMO continues to recommend that municipal governments should have a mandated voice in OHTs both on service planning and governance tables.

AMO recommends that a time limited staff working group be formed with municipal representatives, the Ministry of Health, and Ontario Health. This group could further collective work on municipal engagement with OHTs.

Mental Health and Addictions

Better supporting mental health and addictions continues to top the list of priorities expressed by AMO members. Municipal governments and the District Social Service Administration Boards (DSSABs) are on the front lines and are often the first point of contact for people presenting with mental health conditions and addictions. This happens in social service settings, emergency services, contacts with public health, and when accessing other municipal services.

Many municipal governments have stepped in to fill the gap where provincial services are lacking at the community level. Municipal governments, DSSABs, and local public health agencies are contributing to solutions on the ground; however, more provincial funding, engagement, and service connections can help facilitate a more integrated approach. We are encouraged by the new investments announced as part of the federal and provincial agreement. In addition to the investments in Youth Wellness Hubs and the Structured Psychotherapy Program, AMO continues to call for more investment in community-based mental health and

addictions services including supportive housing, along with the development and implementation of an integrated and comprehensive provincial-municipal response to mental health and addictions.

Supportive Housing

As mentioned above, an increased supply of supportive housing units is needed to respond to the needs of our communities. This includes units for those requiring mental health and addictions supports, but also for vulnerable seniors. Despite growing demand, housing and support options that address the needs of seniors are less available and accessible in communities. Seniors' supportive housing is a viable option for seniors to receive assistance within the community while providing relief from the demand for long-term care homes by delaying deferring a move to long-term care. Investment in supportive housing to meet the needs of all those who could benefit from supports will provide better care within communities for residents.

Health Services for Individuals Experiencing Homelessness Initiative

Recent investments in this initiative in Toronto are providing much needed supports for unhoused Torontonians. This initiative should be expanded across Ontario. Many municipal governments and District Social Service Administration Boards are filling in the gaps where provincial funding for health services and navigation supports are lacking. This has included hiring nurses which is not financially sustainable or appropriate given that health care is a provincial responsibility. The expansion of the initiative, even on a pilot basis, would greatly benefit people experiencing homelessness in communities across Ontario.

AMO looks forward to working with your Ministry on these pressing health issues. There is an opportunity to leverage federal funding to make much needed progress on advancing the health of Ontario's communities. We hope to see new investments in these areas in the upcoming budget. AMO looks forward to continuing this discussion with the Ministry of Health at the MOU table and as part of a broader Social and Economic Prosperity Review.

Sincerely,



Colin Best
President, Association of Municipalities of Ontario
Regional Councillor, Halton Region

cc: The Honourable Doug Ford, Premier of Ontario
The Honourable Paul Calandra, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing
Martha Greenberg, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing
Peter Kaftarian, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Health