

April 23, 2018

The Honourable Dr. Helena Jaczek
Minister of Health and Long-Term Care
Hepburn Block, 10th Floor
80 Grosvenor Street
Toronto, Ontario M7A 2C4

Re: Improving the Odds - Championing Health Equity in Ontario
2016 Annual Report of the Chief Medical Officer of Health of Ontario

Dear Minister Jaczek,

On behalf of the Association of Public Health Epidemiologists of Ontario (APHEO), I am writing to express our strong support for the recommendations as presented in the Chief Medical Officer of Health (CMOH) 2016 Annual Report, *Improving the Odds - Championing Health Equity in Ontario*.

The report illustrates the unique position public health units hold in championing health equity at the local level. As a component of the new relationship between public health units and local health integration networks (LHINs), public health units will be responsible for bringing community health information to LHIN planning tables and advocating for the health care system to look beyond traditional health measures to the socio-demographic factors that influence health. To fulfill this role, public health units will need robust local data.

One of the key recommendations in the report was for the provision of local data that is granular enough to conduct meaningful analysis at a neighbourhood level; this provision would enable public health units and LHINs to understand health inequities that exist within their communities and inform community development efforts. The 2016 report also had made references to the 2015 CMOH report, which recommended that Ontario establish an ongoing health survey that will give all public health units, regardless of size or resources, access to timely high-quality information.

Local public health epidemiologists can appreciate that a population health approach to health system planning will contribute to the sustainability of the health care system. The new Ontario Public Health Standards set our clear expectations for public health units to champion and facilitate the types of analyses and public policies that reduce health inequities. Our expertise in population health assessment and surveillance can support such a re-orientation; however, we must have the tools and resources to carry out these functions. Our toolbox needs to include local, granular data to understand the complex, inter-related factors that drive health disparities at the neighbourhood level.

We were pleased to see those challenges profiled in the 2016 CMOH report, and we support actions that will bring these recommendations to fruition. Our members deal with the daily challenge of providing relevant, timely, and consistent evidence for population health assessments that is inclusive of our entire legislative mandate, within the budgetary constraints of our local public health organizations.

As highlighted in the 2016 CMOH report, mortality, especially premature mortality, is a key indicator for measuring and understanding health equity; however, public health units are challenged with using outdated mortality data. The most recent mortality data available to public health units at this time is 2012, six years out of date from current time. The lack of timely access to this data significantly restricts our capability apply mortality data analyses in a meaningful way that will meet current needs and inform

future strategic investments. As such, we would like to request the Minister undertake all necessary steps to obtain more consistent and timely updates of Vital Statistics data to public health organizations through the Ministry-maintained web portal IntelliHEALTH.

We would also like to take this opportunity to follow up with the Minister on updates to any provincial-level initiatives to address the recommendations from the 2015 CMOH report, especially the provincial health survey. We would like to reiterate that a provincial survey that collects data at the community and neighbourhood levels will allow public health units and our partners to understand the complexity of health equity issues, identify priority issues and populations, and plan and evaluate public health programs and interventions. The recommendation for implementing a new population health survey is also important in the context of *Patients First* and the new Ontario Public Health Standards. Information derived from this provincial population health survey would significantly enhance local efforts to inform health system planning with sound evidence, and to ensure our healthcare system is integrated, accessible, transparent, and accountable.

As articulated by the 2016 CMOH report, strategic investments in health equity research, partnerships and data will help improve the odds for good health for all Ontarians. They will pay off in better health outcomes for individuals, healthier, happier, fairer communities and lower health care and social costs. We look forward to working together to implement the recommendations made through the CMOH 2016 report.

Sincerely,



Vidya Sunil,
APHEO President

Copy:

Dr. David Williams, Chief Medical Officer of Health

Dr. Bob Bell, Deputy Minister of Health and Long-Term Care

Sharon Lee Smith, Associate Deputy Minister of Health and Long-Term Care

Nancy Naylor, Associate Deputy Minister of Health and Long-Term Care

Roselle Martino, Assistant Deputy Minister, Population and Public Health Division