



April 24, 2019

The Honourable Christine Elliott, Minister, Deputy Premier  
Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care  
80 Grosvenor St., Toronto, M7A 1E9

RE: 2019 Ontario Budget - Modernization of Public Health Units

Dear Minister Elliott,

On behalf of the Association of Public Health Epidemiologists in Ontario (APHEO), I write to you today in response to the announcement from the Provincial government regarding the 'Modernization of Public Health Units', referenced in the 2019 Provincial Budget released on April 11, 2019.

APHEO is a not-for-profit association comprised of approximately 300 members who seek to advance and promote the discipline and professional practice of public health epidemiology in Ontario. Our members include epidemiologists and analysts, employed by the 35 boards of health, who hold substantial knowledge and expertise in population health assessment, surveillance and monitoring. In our locally situated positions, we provide the data and information required to:

- identify and prioritize the health needs and issues affecting the health and well-being of local communities;
- inform the development and delivery of effective, efficient, and evidence- and needs-based public health programs and services;
- protect local communities from infectious disease outbreaks and other public health threats by working with local services, including hospitals and health service providers;
- inform and advise municipalities on policies impacting the built environment and the delivery of provincially mandated programs and services (e.g., social assistance, employment support, affordable housing, low-income dental care); and,
- support community partners (e.g., school boards, non-profit organizations) in the development of resource allocation strategies, creation of targeted approaches to community issues, and evaluation on the return on investment for their programs and services.

Furthermore, with the establishment of the Ontario Health Teams in this upcoming year, local epidemiologists and analysts will play a critical role in contributing to health system planning efforts in order to provide integrated and coordinated care for patients.

As an association, APHEO respects the government's direction of modernizing the public health sector to improve its focus on Ontario's residents, broader municipal engagement, more efficient

service delivery, better alignment with the health care system and more effective staff recruitment and retention. In addition, APHEO would value the opportunity to be engaged in formulating next steps to move the public health sector forward. We are concerned, however, that the significant reduction in the number of boards of health from 35 to 10 and potential cuts to funding could result in major gaps in the assessment of local community health needs, reduced responsiveness to emerging local health issues, and erosion of strong local partnerships. Without careful planning, local consultations and considerations of local contexts, these changes have the potential to harm the health and well-being of all Ontarians.

For public health to be effective and efficient in improving the health and well-being of all Ontarians, we ask you and your Ministry to take into consideration the following when planning your next steps:

- 1. Epidemiologists and analysts that are employed and situated locally are better able to contextualize and disseminate data and information in an actionable way.**
- 2. Public health programs and services need to be locally-informed (e.g., by municipalities, school boards, non-profit organizations, local health service providers, clients and the public) and locally-delivered to remain effective, efficient, equitable, timely, and community- and client-centred.**

The APHEO Executive Committee offers its full support of its Executive and the expertise of its membership to work with the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and other agencies, to modernize public health in Ontario. I look forward to having the opportunity to discuss this further and I am available to speak with you or Ministry representatives at any time.

Sincerely,



Stanley Ing, MPH, BAsC, CPHI(C)

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*"...when the public health department is doing its job, we are not noticed. It is only when a crisis occurs that we are visible..."*

*- Paul Borawski, Past CEO, American Society for Quality*

cc: Dr. David Williams, Chief Medical Officer of Health  
Dr. Robert Kyle, President, Association of Local Public Health Agencies  
Karen Ellis-Scharfenberg, President, Ontario Public Health Association