

# The Ontario Association of Public Health Nursing Leaders

## Leading the Way for Public Health Nursing

May 2, 2019

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Re: Modernizing Ontario's Public Health Units

Dear Minister Elliott,

On behalf of the Ontario Association of Public Health Nursing Leaders (OPHNL), I am responding to the recent provincial budget announcement regarding Modernizing Ontario's Public Health Units. The reduction of public health units from 35 to 10 regional entities within the proposed timeline will cause major disruptions in every facet of the system and result in substantial reductions in frontline public health services.

We understand that it is the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care's desire to keep public health services responsive to the local needs. To this end, it is important to appreciate that needs within and between communities vary considerably and public health has a specific and proven role to play in creating effective partnerships and building community capacity to improve the health and well-being for all.

As the Ministry moves forward with their plans to modernize Ontario's Public Health Units, public health nursing input will be essential. Our association believes that engagement with public health nurses and nursing leaders is critical as the Ministry develops the path forward for a revitalized system. In this regard, the OPHNL executive is offering the support of our executive and members during this transition. We are well-positioned to share our knowledge and expertise in the role and function of public health nursing in a modernized public health system in Ontario.

Public health nurses make up the largest number of providers within the public health system and can offer effective solutions to support the new vision for public health. Public health nurses possess critical knowledge and skills that support the assessment of community needs and we provide leadership in the design of services that are based on best practices. Some examples include: addressing health inequities by understanding the needs of vulnerable clients and populations; investigating cases to prevent the spread of diseases; bringing community partners together to plan for mental health and addictions services in communities; offering parenting and mental health promotion supports, breastfeeding/nutrition, and healthy lifestyles services to young families and school students; and building capacity among healthcare providers on infection prevention practices.

The mission of OPHNL is to promote and protect the health of Ontarians through excellence in public health nursing leadership. Our members are public health nurses employed at the management level in Public Health Units. We demonstrate progressive leadership and are supportive of advances in the scope of nurses to ensure access to timely services for our clients and communities. In this regard, we have brought together a provincial workgroup to develop policies and best practices to plan and pilot prescribing by registered nurses in certain public health settings. As we transition to a "modernized" public health system, we have the capacity and mechanisms to reach out to public health nursing leaders across the province to support collaboration in public health approaches and the sharing of key communication and information from the Ministry. We can also provide advice in realignment of public health nursing human resources in the new structures.

Hon. Christine Elliott  
Minister of Health and Long-Term Care

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Our association looks forward to dialogue with the Ministry in the near future. We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you. To schedule a meeting, please contact Hamida Bhimani by email at [hamida.bhimani@york.ca](mailto:hamida.bhimani@york.ca) or by phone at 905 830-4444 x 74402.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "H. K. Bhimani". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underlining the name.

Hamida Bhimani  
President, OPHNL

c.c Ms. Helen Angus; Deputy Minister  
c.c. Dr. David Williams; Chief Medical Officer of Health  
c.c Dr. Michelle Acorn; Provincial Chief Nursing Officer  
c.c. Dr. Robert Kyle; President, Association of Local Official Health Agencies (ALPHA)

