February 25, 2016

The Honourable Dr. Eric Hoskins  
Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care  
10th Floor, Hepburn Block  
80 Grosvenor Street  
Toronto, ON M7A 2C4

Dear Minister Hoskins:

The board of health for Peterborough County-City Health Unit recently received a staff report on the Herpes Zoster Vaccine, at our request. As individual board members, we are aware of both the serious complications of Herpes Zoster reactivation, or “Shingles”, and the significant cost of the vaccine. We are also aware that the currently available vaccine, Zostavax II™, produced by Merck Canada Inc., appears to have a limited length of time where it is considered protective.

The burden of illness associated with Herpes Zoster reactivation is considerable, with a lifetime risk of 30%. For persons over 80 years of age, the incidence has been estimated to be 8.4/1,000. The debilitating neurogenic pain syndrome that can occur following shingles, called post-herpetic neuralgia, occurs in 20% of all cases, but increases to more than a third of octogenarians.

The Provincial Infectious Diseases Advisory Committee (PIDAC) for Ontario released a report in 2013 which examined several options for a publicly funded vaccine program for herpes zoster. PIDAC found that the vaccine was cost-effective under a wide range of assumptions, particularly for adults aged 65-70 years of age. PIDAC recommended that the provision of the vaccine for 65 year olds, as this is also the age eligibility for the pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine. Providing the vaccine to 60 year olds, as currently recommended by the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) would be more expensive but also more equitable, as all persons for whom the vaccine is recommended by NACI would be eligible.

We understand that there is a new vaccine currently in development that may present a much more effective and longer lasting option. The availability of this promising vaccine would only enhance the economic evaluations that have already been done.

We call upon you and your government to seriously consider adding the herpes zoster vaccine to the list of publicly funded vaccines available to Ontario’s adults. Immunization continues to be one of our most effective tools in the prevention of disease and promotion of health, and this remains true throughout the life cycle, including into our later years.
We appreciate your consideration of this important addition as you move forward with Vision 20/20, the modernization of our provincial immunization system.

Yours in health,

Original signed by

Scott McDonald
Chair, Board of Health

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cc: Hon. Dipika Damerla, Associate Minister of Health and Long-Term Care
Dr. David Williams, Ontario Chief Medical Officer of Health
M.P.P. Jeff Leal, Peterborough
M.P.P. Laurie Scott, Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock
Ontario Boards of Health
Association of Local Public Health Agencies