October 1, 2019

The Honourable Christine Elliott  
Minister of Health  
10th Floor, Hepburn Block  
80 Grosvenor Street  
Toronto, ON M7A 2C4  
Sent via e-mail: christine.elliott@pc.ola.org

Dear Minister Elliott,

Re: Addressing the Opioid Emergency in Ontario - Recommendations from the Association of Municipalities of Ontario

As Ontario develops its Mental Health and Addiction strategy, Peterborough’s board of health hopes that there will be specific attention paid to the opioid crisis that has emerged over the years, fueled by increased rates of opioid prescribing and only made worse by the contamination of the illicit drug supply by fentanyl.

We believe that the recent submission, in September, of recommendations from the Association of Municipalities of Ontario1 (AMO) presents your government with a comprehensive and carefully considered set of actions that we hope will be seriously considered. These were reviewed at the board’s September meeting, with the subsequent decision that its support and endorsement for these recommendations be expressed to you.

The AMO recommendations contain four foundation actions for your government to consider:

- **That the opioid crisis be recognized as a priority**, with the appropriate attention and resourcing required to address it in a comprehensive and effective manner;
- **That an “all of government approach”** be used to ensure that upstream prevention of substance use and other components of the crisis are addressed;
- **That, in order to ensure success, a provincial coordinator** be identified who can focus solely on this one issue and broker the right relationships and partnerships required to achieve the needed results; and
- **Formal means** be established to allow for transparent, accountable and two-way communications.

In addition, the AMO recommendations outline specific strategies that a provincial coordinator would undertake as components of this comprehensive, all of government approach. Taken as a whole, they provide solid advice that has been gleaned from the front lines, from the evidence, and from provincial expertise. We hope that you will find the recommendations to provide helpful guidance as you further develop your response.

As Minister of Health, we look to you for your leadership during these challenging times. Peterborough’s population has been hit hard, with opioid poisonings and deaths occurring at an alarming rate. In the first quarter of 2019, we experienced a confirmed death rate of 6.2 per 100,000, a rate much higher than the
provincial rate of 2.7 deaths per 100,000. We are concerned that more needs to be done but with the dissolution of the Central East LHIN board, we no longer have a common meeting place for the planning, coordination and prioritization of health sector services like these.

The strategy that we contributed to developing, through the Central East LHIN, will require updating and adaptation to ensure that we do not lose ground, but instead, continue to build on our successes to date. For example, more people are receiving timely and effective access to treatment for addictions, through our RAAM clinic. Since opening, the Peterborough RAAM clinic has seen over 400 new patients. Of these, 35% were seeking help for opioid use.

Our board of health supports the need for enhanced treatment options for those who fail to respond to oral agonists and we hope that Ontario will provide our community with funded access to injectable opioid agonist treatment options. The recent publication of clinical and operational guidelines now make this a stronger possibility. We hope, too, that harm reduction efforts will be expanded to include supervised consumption as an opportunity to provide life-saving response and prevent deaths from poisonings. We hope that more people with addictions and mental illness will be diverted away from the criminal justice system and into treatment and harm reduction services. And we hope that people with lived experience of substance use will be included in the planning, delivery and evaluation of a comprehensive strategy to ensure that we can capitalize on their insights and build a response that is inclusive, barrier-free and life affirming.

Municipalities and local public health agencies are working together to ensure that communities are responsive to their local opioid emergencies, and that Naloxone is available to assist with reversing the deadly effects of acute poisonings. But we do not act in a vacuum and we will be unable to make a difference unless we can be part of a bigger, comprehensive, complex yet coordinated strategy. That is what the AMO recommendations address, and we wish to emphasize their utility and timeliness as you progress toward a provincial Mental Health and Addictions strategy. We congratulate AMO for convening a working group to prepare and present these recommendations to you, Minister Elliott. And we hope that they will provide you with the guidance you seek in order to ensure Ontario is meeting its obligation to protect the health of its residents.

Sincerely,

Original signed by

Councillor Kathryn Wilson
Chair, Board of Health

cc: Hon. Doug Ford, Premier of Ontario
Monika Turner, Director of Policy, Association of Municipalities of Ontario
Local MPPs
Local Municipal and First Nation Councils
Peterborough Drug Strategy
Association of Local Public Health Agencies
Ontario Boards of Health

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2 Communications, September 30, 2019

Serving the residents of Curve Lake and Hiawatha First Nations, and the County and City of Peterborough