

Impact of Reducing Investments in Public Health

alPHa Position Statement

April 24, 2019

The Association of Local Public Health Agencies (alPHa), which represents Ontario's Medical Officers of Health, Boards of Health and frontline public health professionals throughout the province, remains deeply concerned about the Government's plans to restructure Ontario's public health system. Following a briefing hosted by the Chief Medical Officer of Health last Thursday afternoon, we are further concerned about the recently announced changes to the provincial/municipal cost-sharing formula that funds local public health.

On April 11, in the 2019 Ontario Budget, the Government announced that it will replace 35 public health units and 35 local boards of health with 10 larger regional entities with boards of health of unknown composition and size, with the exception of City of Toronto, which will be one of the Regions. The Government's significant reduction in the provincial contribution to the funding formula is of concern, especially as the first phase takes effect in this current fiscal year. Complicating matters is that further details are not known at this time and the proposed one-year timeframe for the reduction from 35 to 10 public health units is extremely ambitious given the complexities of delivering public health services. The magnitude of these changes is significant and will cause major disruptions in every facet of the system. This will result in substantial reductions in frontline public health services such as vaccination programs and outbreak investigations. We are particularly concerned about the reduction in funding to Toronto Public Health that will see the provincial contribution reduced within three years to 50% because infectious diseases do not stop at municipal borders and all areas of the province needs sufficient funding to adequately protect the public. Given all of this, alPHa is calling upon the Ontario Government to re-consider the cuts and the timelines.

Key public health responsibilities are mandated by the Ontario Public Health Standards and local delivery of these contributes to ensuring that Ontarians have safe and healthy communities:

- Chronic Disease Prevention and Well-Being
- Emergency Management
- Food Safety
- Health Equity
- Healthy Environments
- Healthy Growth and Development
- Immunization
- Infectious and Communicable Diseases Prevention and Control
- Population Health Assessment
- Safe Water
- School Health, including Oral Health
- Substance Use and Injury Prevention

Much of the success of our locally based public health system can be attributed to partnerships with municipal governments, schools and other community stakeholders to develop healthy public policies, build community capacity to address health issues and promote environments that are oriented towards healthy behaviours. The health protection and promotion needs of Ontarians vary significantly depending on their communities, and preserving these partnerships is essential to meeting them regardless of the number of public health units.

Public health works as a system that is greater than the sum of its parts. By leveraging the skills and experience of boards of health, nutritionists, nurses, health promoters, inspectors, epidemiologists, doctors, dentists and dental hygienists, board members and administrators, and more, the health of Ontarians is supported and protected. Public health delivers promotion, protection and prevention services on behalf of, and in partnership with, the Ontario Government which has the responsibility for the health of the people of Ontario.

One of the ways to end hallway medicine is to prevent illness. Local public health agencies reduce the demand for hospital and primary care services by keeping people healthy. Building healthy communities through an efficient, proactive and locally managed public health system--one that is mandated to lead on preventative measures to protect and promote the health of Ontarians--can go a long way to reducing that demand. When combined with stable, designated funding, the public health system has the capacity to relieve pressure on doctors and hospitals. Furthermore, accountability is firmly established by provincial legislation and policy ensuring that the money spent on public health is spent effectively and with purpose.

Ontario's public health system delivers value for money, ensuring Ontarians remain healthy, and are able to contribute fully to a prosperous Ontario. Studies have shown tremendous return on investment. For example, every \$1 spent on:

- **mental health and addictions** saves \$7 in health costs and \$30 dollars in lost productivity and social costs;
- **immunizing children** with the measles-mumps-rubella vaccine saves \$16 in health care costs; and
- **early childhood development and health care** saves up to \$9 in future spending on health, social and justice services.

In short, public health actions now can result in fewer emergency room and doctor's office visits today and in the future. Local public health's impact is beyond simply reducing health care dollars. Local public health ensures that healthy people can support a strong economy, providing a direct economic impact. The old adage 'an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure' is certainly relevant to public health.

We look forward to receiving more details of this plan from the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care so that we can work with the government. To this end, alPha will continue to communicate with the Minister, the Hon. Christine Elliott, and Dr. David Williams, Chief Medical Officer of Health, towards ensuring that alPha members, and its partners including the Association of Municipalities of Ontario and the City of Toronto, are extensively consulted before final decisions are made with respect to the governance, management and administration of a regionalized public health system and the delivery of frontline public health programs and services.

We can help ensure that Ontario's public health system continues to draw strength from dedicated local voices and effective partnerships. It will be crucial to maintain the capacity to deliver essential frontline health protection and promotion services while working to meet the Government's stated goals of broader municipal engagement, more efficient service delivery, better alignment with the health care system and more effective staff recruitment and retention.

alPHA acknowledges, appreciates and supports the voices of all its members. We encourage you to meet with your local mayors, municipal council(s), MPs and MPPs. We also encourage you to make use of alPHA's resources:

- [Speaking Notes – Toronto Board of Health Meeting April 15th](#)
- [alPHA News Release - Budget 2019 & PH Restructure](#)
- [alPHA Memo to Members - Budget 2019](#)
- [alPHA Post-Election Flyer](#)
- [alPHA Pre-Budget Submission 2019](#)
- [Resource Paper](#)
- [Local Public Health Responses](#)
- [alPHA Submission - Expert Panel on Public Health](#)
- alPHA Promotional material including the [brochure](#) and [video](#)
- Follow alPHA on Twitter: @PHAgencies

alPHA will continue to keep our members updated and advocate on their behalf so that Ontarians continue to have a local public health system that remains on the frontlines to protect and promote the health of all Ontarians.

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About alPHA

The Association of Local Public Health Agencies (alPHA) is a non-profit organization that provides leadership to Ontario's boards of health and public health units. The Association works with governments and other health organizations, to advocate for a strong and effective local public health system in the province, as well as public health policies, programs and services that benefit all Ontarians.