June 17, 2021

The Hon. Christine Elliott  
Minister of Health, Deputy Premier  
Ministry of Health  
College Park 5th Floor  
777 Bay St, Toronto, ON M7A 2J3

The Hon. Doug Ford  
Premier of Ontario  
Legislative Building  
Queen's Park  
Toronto, ON M7A 1A1

Dear Minister Elliott/Premier Elect Doug Ford:

**Appeal to the Province of Ontario – Public Health Funding**

The Board of Health for the Windsor-Essex County Health Unit operates as an autonomous Board of Health. The Windsor-Essex County Health Unit (WECHU) services the geographic area of Windsor and Essex County, having a population of 398,953 based on the 2016 census.

In April 2019, with the proclamation of the 2019 Ontario Budget, Protecting what Matters Most, the Province of Ontario made changes to the funding model for public health units as well as introduced modernization plans having an impact on the structure and delivery of public health in Ontario. More specifically, regionalization to achieve economies of scale, streamlined back-office functions and better-coordinated action by public health units. Funding changes, which included:

- Mandatory programs funded at 75% by the Province of Ontario and 25% by the Obligated Municipalities would change to a model of 70% and 30% respectively;
- Related programs funded at a rate of 100% by the Province of Ontario, would change to being funded at a rate of 70% by the Province of Ontario and 30% by the Obligated Municipalities

These funding changes represented a substantial shift in the burden of public health funding to the obligated municipalities in a relatively short timeframe. After consultations with the Association of Municipalities of Ontario as well as other stakeholders, the Province of Ontario approved mitigation funding equivalent to the change in the percentage of the funding allotment. The mitigation funding was for a two-year period expiring December 31, 2021.

On March 20, 2020, the WECHU reported its first case of COVID-19 in Windsor and Essex County (WEC). WEC is home to one of the busiest border crossings in North America. Approximately six thousand (6,000) residents in WEC work in the state of Michigan and, in particular, seventeen hundred (1,700) in the health care industry. In addition, WEC is home to eight thousand (8,000) to ten thousand (10,000) temporary foreign workers, one hundred seventy-six (176) farms and over seven hundred (700) seasonal accommodations. WEC also has forty-four (44) long-term care and retirement homes. These characteristics have made it challenging, from a public health perspective, to...
manage the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. To date, WEC has had 16,753 cases of COVID-19 of which, 1,920 represent Variants of Concern. Our community has lost 433 of our residents to COVID-19.

On January 1, 2021, the WECHU started COVID-19 vaccination efforts in the community beginning with the vaccination of staff and residents of long-term care and retirement homes followed by other priority groups as mandated by the Ministry of Health. Our approach was and continues to be a coordinated effort with various stakeholders in the community, all with a common goal, to return our hard-hit community to some semblance of normalcy. To date, we have successfully immunized 72.9% of our adult population with one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. In addition, 27.4% of our adult residents are now fully vaccinated with the completion of a two-dose series. It is anticipated that vaccination efforts will continue throughout the summer months.

In the months and year ahead, the WECHU will focus on planning and administering programs that are centred on the recovery needs of our community. Additional human resource capacity previously hired to support case and contact management, as well as vaccination administration, will be deployed to support recovery efforts. The loss of mitigation funding effective January 1, 2022, impacts those efforts. The WECHU will be required to reduce human resource capacity to meet operating budgets at the expense of meeting the public health needs of our community.

The WECHU endeavours to carry out its fiduciary responsibilities while balancing the needs of the residents of WEC. We respectfully request that the Province of Ontario reconsider its approach to funding public health. Public health has been instrumental in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and it is crucial that the focus of Public Health in Ontario continues to meet the needs of the communities it serves.

Sincerely,

Gary McNamara
Board of Health Chair

Theresa Marentette, RN, MSc
CEO, Chief Nursing Officer

c: Dr. David Williams, Chief Medical Officer of Health, Ontario
Lisa Gretzky, MPP Windsor-West
Percy Hatfield, MPP Windsor-Tecumseh
Taras Natyshak, MPP Essex
Rick Nicholls, MPP Chatham-Kent-Leamington

Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO)
Brian Masse, MP Windsor-West
Irek Kusmierczyk, MP Windsor-Tecumseh
Chris Lewis, MP Essex
Dave Epp, MP Chatham-Kent-Leamington