February 14, 2019

Dear Premier Ford

Re: Support for Provincial Oral Health Program for Low-Income Adults and Seniors

I am writing to you on behalf of the Board of Health for the Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge District Health Unit (Health Unit) to express our support for the Government of Ontario’s commitment to build a provincial dental program for low-income seniors by increasing the funding for dental services in Public Health Units (PHUs), Community Health Centres (CHCs), and Aboriginal Health Access Centres and by investing in new dental services in underserviced areas including increasing the capacity in PHUs and investing in mobile dental buses. The Health Unit’s Oral Health staff take pride in being able to assist parents of children and youth 17 and under in our communities to access the Healthy Smiles Ontario program to look after their children’s oral health needs and look forward to being able to help local seniors access dental care.

In our Health Unit area, we are fortunate to have two CHCs, one in Northumberland County and one in the City of Kawartha Lakes that offer low-cost dental programs, and there is a volunteer dental clinic in Haliburton County, run by dental professionals who provide treatment at no cost to residents with serious dental care needs. Our local social service agencies are able to offer some limited discretionary dental assistance to recipients of Ontario Works. Northumberland County Community & Social Services also has a Community Outreach program that may be able to provide minimal funding to some low-income adults and seniors to assist with health issues like dental care.

Despite the existence of these programs, our Health Unit’s Oral Health staff regularly hear from adults and seniors who fail to qualify for these programs because discretionary funding has run out, they are not financially or clinically eligible for the program and/or they simply cannot afford to pay the reduced rate offered. This leaves many residents no choice but to visit their local Emergency Room (ER). Hospital data from the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care tell us that in 2015, 1,208 adults living in our Health Unit area visited the ER for dental-related issues. At an estimated $513 per dental-related ER visit, this cost the system $619,700, for patients to access a painkiller or an antibiotic but no dental treatment. We also know from these data that over 75% of those visiting the ER are adults between the ages of 20 and 64. We therefore ask that while developing the proposed dental program for low-income seniors, that your government consider how this program could eventually expand into a dental care program that also serves low-income adults.

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We look forward to receiving more information about how Ontario public health units can facilitate and support the implementation of a new public dental program for low-income seniors, with the potential for this program to also serve low-income adults in the future.

Thank you again for your commitment to improving the oral health and overall health of Ontarians.

Sincerely

BOARD OF HEALTH FOR THE HALIBURTON, KAWARTHA, PINE RIDGE DISTRICT HEALTH UNIT

Cammie Jaquays
Chair, Board of Health

AR/ALN:ed

cc (via email): Honourable Christine Elliott, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care
Dr. David Williams, Chief Medical Officer of Health, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care
Mr. David Piccini, MPP, Northumberland Peterborough South
Ms. Laurie Scott, MPP, Haliburton Kawartha Brock
Municipalities within the Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge District Health Unit area
All Ontario Boards of Health
Ms. Loretta Ryan, Executive Director, Association of Local Public Health Agencies
Ms. Pegeen Walsh, Executive Director, Ontario Public Health Association
Association of Municipalities of Ontario