March 12, 2015

The Honourable Dr. Eric Hoskins, M.P.P.
Minister of Health & Long-Term Care
Minister’s Office, Hepburn Block 10th Floor
80 Grosvenor Street,
Toronto, ON M7A 2C4

Dear Minister Hoskins:

At its February 4, 2015 meeting, Lambton County Council (which serves as the Lambton County Board of Health) endorsed the following motion:

Arnold/Boushy: That staff prepare correspondence for the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care citing its concerns over the possible lack of discretion and the creation of gaps in service for vulnerable children once the Province completes its new proposed changes for the integration of dental services.

The Ministry of Health & Long-Term Care has announced that beginning August 2015 it will integrate all publicly funded Dental programs for children into one program called Healthy Smiles Ontario. It is unclear how children who are currently eligible to receive public health unit services but do not meet the strict requirements of the Healthy Smiles Ontario financial means test will access services in the new program. Many children whose families struggle to afford dental care but who are “not poor enough” to qualify may not be able to receive preventive services or assistance for emergency dental care. This will create barriers and health inequities for many children in Lambton County. Children with unmet dental needs and who are at risk of poor oral health outcomes may fall into system gaps, necessitating more extensive and costly dental treatment down the road.

Ensuring continued access to oral health care services for vulnerable children supports a number of important initiatives of your government, including Ontario’s Poverty Reduction Strategy and Ontario’s Healthy Kids Strategy. I commend you for recognizing that the proposed integration of Healthy Smiles Ontario must be carefully mapped to avoid negative, unintended consequences. I call on you to provide a specific plan detailing how current levels of program access will be maintained so that concerned families and health professionals across the Province can rest assured that vulnerable children will not be losing access to oral health care.
Please do not hesitate to contact my office should you desire to discuss this matter further.

Yours sincerely,

Bev MacDougall,
Warden, County of Lambton
Chair, Lambton County Board of Health

cc: Andrew Taylor, General Manager, Public Health Services, County of Lambton
    Dr. Sudit Ranade, Medical Officer of Health, County of Lambton
    Dr Maria vanHarten, Dental Consultant
    Bob Bailey, MPP, Sarnia-Lambton
    Monte McNaughton, MPP, Lambton-Kent-Middlesex
    Pat Davidson, MP, Sarnia-Lambton
    Bev Shipley, MP, Lambton-Kent-Middlesex
    Linda Stewart, Executive Director, aPHa