February 6, 2019

The Honourable Doug Ford
Premier of Ontario
Legislative Building
Queens’s Park
Toronto, ON M7A 1A1

Dear Premier Ford:

Re: Support of a Provincial Oral Health Program for Seniors

The Board of Health for the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (Board) is encouraged by the new provincial government’s support for a provincial oral health program for low-income seniors. The financial, health and social impacts of poor oral health in seniors has been a long standing area of concern for our Board.

In 2016, our Board sent a letter to the Minister of Health calling on the Provincial Government to expand access to publically funded dental care for all low income adults, including low income seniors and all institutionalized seniors. The letter cited how access to prevention and dental treatment would reduce oral health inequities in Ontario that profoundly impact some of the most vulnerable people in our local jurisdiction and the Province as a whole.

As an indication of this need, in 2017 there were 4,069 visits to emergency departments within hospitals in Simcoe and Muskoka for oral health reasons. This figure remains highly troubling. It shows that a large number of our residents lack access to preventive and restorative oral health care, and therefore, need to resort to emergency departments for their dental needs. Unfortunately, these visits further burden an already overwhelmed hospital system and ultimately fail to address the underlying oral health problems causing pain and infection.

The Ontario Progressive Conservative Party has pledged to implement a publically funded dental care program for low income seniors. As well, they have committed to increase dental services through Public Health Units, Community Health Centres, and Aboriginal Health Access Centres and to increase funding to provide investment for service delivery in underserviced areas. Our Board sees firsthand the positive impact that our Healthy Smiles Dental Clinics have on the clients and communities we serve. In 2018, we completed approximately 4,300 appointments for eligible clients in our clinics and over 900 preventive appointments for
Healthy Smiles Ontario children in schools. We support increasing clinical capacity, including in Public Health Units, in order to address the severe need among low income seniors. We await further news concerning public health’s role in reducing barriers to oral health, increasing service delivery for low income seniors and improving health system efficiency.

Sincerely,

ORIGINAL Signed By:

Anita Dubeau
Chair, Board of Health

AD:HM:cm

Cc. Honorable Christine Elliot, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care
Dr. David Williams, Chief Medical Officer of Health
Members of Provincial Parliament for Simcoe and Muskoka
Ontario Boards of Health
Ms. Loretta Ryan, Association of Local Public Health Agencies
Ms. Jacquie Maund and Ms. Anna Rusak, Ontario Oral Health Alliance
Mayors and Councils in Simcoe Muskoka
Central Local Health Integration Network
North Simcoe Muskoka Local Health Integration Network