



January 27, 2022

Hon. Christine Elliott
Minister of Health
College Park, 777 Bay St., 5th floor
Toronto, ON M7A 2J3

Dear Minister Elliott,

We commend the government for expediting vaccinations last month and for beginning the fourth dose for the most vulnerable people. Returning to a modified step two of the “Roadmap to Reopen”, while challenging for many people, was also a good step in managing the spread of the virus.

We are concerned with the recent announcement to ease these public health measures. In-person school has just returned for children, surgeries have not resumed in hospitals, and ICU numbers and COVID-related deaths continue to rise. Healthcare workers remain inundated with COVID-related cases – those who are even well enough to work. They cannot afford to see demand continue to rise.

It is too early to relax public health measures. We ask the government extend step two until we have seen at least two weeks of steady decline in COVID-related ICU admissions.

In addition, we want to reiterate the importance of additional measures to protect people in Ontario from this highly infectious variant. We ask the following:

- Repeal Bill 124 to address the shortage of critical healthcare workers and show that they are valued and respected
 - Ontario needs to deliver a comprehensive health human resources strategy to address the strained healthcare workforce and address the severe gaps in health care workers.
 - Healthcare workers have worked tirelessly, often putting themselves and their loved ones at risk. They are tired, frustrated, and leaving in numbers that are irreplaceable.
 - This Bill is impacting the health human resources needed to get through this pandemic, to care for its long-term physical and mental health impact on people in Ontario, and to continue to deliver needed care for acute and chronic conditions.
 - Healthcare workers are critical for our wellbeing and our recovery, and they must be recognized for this. Putting strict limits on their compensation does the opposite.
- Amend Directive #6 to make COVID-19 vaccinations mandatory across all healthcare workers
 - By not having a vaccine mandate, the risk to employees’ and patients’ health from COVID-19 outbreaks and the risks to staffing shortages if staff become sick are significant and unpredictable.
 - The risks posed by a vaccine mandate, while a one-time challenge, are more predictable and less likely to impact patient care.
- Increase sick days to 10 days
 - We must ensure that all people in Ontario are protected and that we do not create additional hardships on those who cannot afford to be sick.

- Access to testing and appropriate PPE
 - Access to PCR, rapid antigen tests, and appropriate PPE, including KN95 or N95 masks, must be made easily available for all residents of Ontario, and the importance of using them clearly communicated. As examples, they should be provided free of charge at pharmacies, primary care clinics, schools, and high-traffic areas, like transit stations.
 - While children are lower risk in terms of severity, they are high risk to older and vulnerable people with whom they have contact, including their loved ones. Regular tests for them should be prioritized.
- Access to oral antiviral medication
 - Ensure this is distributed to all primary care offices, once ready, so that there is immediate access for treatments. Please ensure a distribution plan is underway now.
 - It is important to ensure that the distribution plan includes equity strategies so that we do not create further health disparities.
- Redefine “fully vaccinated”
 - Advocate to Health Canada to change the definition of “fully vaccinated” so it encompasses the three-dose vaccine regimen, proven to be more effective than two doses.
 - The current terminology gives a false sense of security and lowers incentive to get a booster. It is also misleading when looking at the number of “fully vaccinated” people in hospitals, which can incite worry on the effectiveness of vaccines.
 - Update the vaccine passport to require three doses for access to the relevant services.

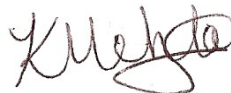
These measures can help avoid future waves and lessen the pandemic’s impact on all sectors. If COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations, and deaths continue to rise with no appropriate public health measures in place, if preventative care is not prioritized, if diagnoses get delayed, and if hospitals are unable to provide needed care for non-COVID related illnesses, many people in Ontario will pay the price.

When the sector is overwhelmed with addressing COVID-19 and where there are still mitigation measures the government can use to help, we call on you to act on them.

Sincerely,



Sarah Hobbs, CEO
Alliance for Healthier Communities



Kavita Mehta, CEO
Association of Family Health Teams of Ontario



Caroline Lidstone-Jones, CEO
Indigenous Primary Health Care Council



Katie Hogue, President
Nurse Practitioner-led Clinic Association

cc.

Dr. Catherine Zahn, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Health

Dr. Kieran Moore, Chief Medical Officer of Health, Ministry of Health

Patrick Dicerni, Assistant Deputy Minister, Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP), Pharmaceuticals and Devices Division

Nadia Surani, Director, Primary Health Care Branch, Ministry of Health