

Feb 28, 2012

Hon. Dalton McGuinty
Premier of Ontario
Office of the Premier
Legislative Building
Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A1A1

Hon. Dwight Duncan
Minister of Finance
Frost Building South
7th Floor
7 Queen's Park Crescent
Toronto ON M7A1Y7

RE: Strengthening Primary Care through a Recruitment and Retention Strategy

Dear Premier McGuinty and Minister Duncan,

You are faced with the challenge of returning Ontario to fiscal balance. *Ontario's Action Plan for Health Care* and the Drummond Commission Report both call on a much greater role for primary care to improve health and reduce costs in our health system. Our three Associations, representing all of the interprofessional primary care models in Ontario, fully support your government in achieving these goals. We look forward to working with you to implement this vision and to achieve the full promise of Primary Care.

We are the Association of Family Health Teams of Ontario, the Association of Ontario Health Centres and the Nurse Practitioners Association of Ontario. Together we represent the 10 Aboriginal Health Access Centres, the 73 Community Health Centres, the 186 Family Health Teams and the 26 Nurse Practitioner Lead Clinics in the province.

We are writing this letter to bring to your attention the critical need to build strong capacity in the primary care sector. Through our joint research we have identified:

- Current staff vacancy rates in primary care are highest in the largest professional categories: 19% for nurse practitioners, 18% for pharmacists, 14% for dietitians, 10% for registered nurses, 5-12% for administrative managers, 7-9% for social workers.
- It takes over 4 months and multiple offers to recruit executive directors, pharmacists and nurse practitioners.
- Turnover leads to at least 6-7% loss of service capacity per year.
- When staff leave, over 50% are lost to primary care completely.
- The most common reasons for turning down offers or leaving positions:
 - 5-30% lower salaries in primary care
 - Lack of HOOPP
 - Lack of full time positions

In the face of these facts, our three associations are collaborating on the development of a **Primary Care Recruitment and Retention Strategy for Ontario**. Two principles have guided our work: Strengthening capacity of primary care organizations to deliver accessible, quality care through recruitment and

retention of the staff needed to deliver that care; and equity within and across primary care organizations to minimize compensation-based competition for staff.

These facts also lead our three associations to strongly urge the Government to **avoid extending the wage freeze for non-unionized primary care staff**. Less than 10% of our interprofessional primary care organizations include collective bargaining units. As a result the wage freeze over the past few years has widened the gap between primary care staff and other comparable unionized health care staff. This has made retention and recruitment more difficult and is only increasing the demand for wage catch-up when it is eventually lifted.

To assist primary care organizations to attract and keep the staff needed to deliver accessible, high quality care, we further recommend **immediate action to enable the HOOPP pension plan to be offered** to primary care staff. Lack of pension has been identified as a significant barrier to mobility of staff and integration of services across health care institutions and the community. This would require funding of \$10.4M to enable primary care organizations to offer HOOPP, accompanied by an additional \$9.1M to increase staff salaries by 2.5% to help defray their contribution to HOOPP.

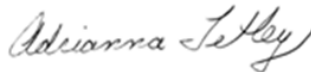
We understand the fiscal environment. We also recognize the need to have a strong, vibrant primary care sector that ensures Ontarians receive the full benefits of “Family Health Care at the Centre of the System” in a way that is fiscally sound and delivers good value for money. Fair compensation that retains and recruits staff is critical to fulfilling the full mandate and promise of primary care.

We would appreciate your full consideration of our recommendations. We are available at your convenience to answer any questions.

Sincerely,



Angie Heydon
Association of Family Health
Teams of Ontario (AFTHO)



Adrianna Tetley
Association of Ontario
Health Centres (AOHC)



Claudia Mariano
Nurse Practitioners
Association of Ontario (NPAO)

Cc: Minister Matthews, Minister of Health and Long Term Care
Chris Carson, Chief of Staff, MOHLTC
Shawn Kerr, Policy Advisor, Minister’s office, MOHLTC
Tim Shortill, Chief of Staff, Minister of Finance
Dan Carbin, Senior Advisor, Principal Secretary and Policy and Research, Office of the Premier
Suzanne McGurn, ADM, Health Human Resources Strategy, MOHLTC
Susan Fitzpatrick, ADM, Negotiations and Accountability Management, MOHLTC