



The Honourable Eric Hoskins, MPP
Minister of Health and Long-term Care
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February 24, 2015

Re: Investment needed in primary care teams now to address growing staff retention and recruitment challenges

Dear Minister Hoskins,

I am writing to you on behalf of the three associations that represent community-based interprofessional primary care teams in Ontario. The Association of Ontario Health Centres (AOHC), the Association of Family Health Teams (AFHTO) and the Nurse Practitioners' Association (NPAO) represent the CHCs, AHACs, FHTs and NPLCs across the province. These interprofessional primary care teams now serve almost 4 million Ontarians.

In your speech at the Empire Club, you spoke of strengthening the front-door to our health care system by utilizing dynamic, primary care teams and leveraging the skills of all health care providers. But with all non-physician wages frozen at the 2006 rate and vacancies running as high as 20%, the front-door has become a revolving door with staff coming in only to leave for better-paying jobs. At a time when the Liberal government has committed to keeping people *out* of hospitals, we are losing our staff *to* the hospitals. Our staff is leaving the sector for higher paying jobs with better benefits and HOOPP. Who can blame them?

Primary care has been grossly undervalued – access and quality care are being undermined. Increasingly, the press is shining a spotlight on this issue with recent articles in the Globe and Mail and The Toronto Star. We have also been contacted by other representatives of print media, radio and TV shows to address this issue. It is trending on social media and on various blogs. Front-line primary care professionals are becoming increasingly vocal and frustrated.

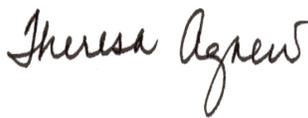
Minister Hoskins, we have developed a phased-in plan to address this crisis and shared it with your staff, Finance Minister Sousa and your predecessor Minister Deb Matthews. A copy is attached. This plan recommends a modest investment that will stabilize the sector and ensure that patients aren't forced to rely on hospital emergency departments as their first point of access into the public system. Your government knows that a strong primary care system keeps patients, especially those living with chronic disease, out of the hospital and living as long as possible in the community. That is why it is so crucial to act now.

We acknowledge the Government's fiscal constraint and that is why we have proposed a four-year plan to implement rates recommended in 2012. This means by 2019, primary care teams would be compensated at 2012 rates. For your convenience we have attached the proposed four-year implementation plan along with associated costs.

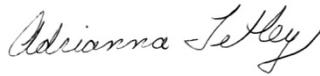
We have been told that this issue is top-of-mind for you and your staff. Fixing this issue one provider or one clinic at a time is not the solution. This only serves to shift the problem. We need a systemic response. We urge the Ontario government to invest in primary care teams, so we can do our jobs keeping people healthier and out of the costly hospital system.

Given the urgency of the situation, we would respectfully request a meeting at your earliest convenience to discuss an implementation plan. Sandra Segovic from the Nurse Practitioners' Association of Ontario is copied on this correspondence and is available to work with your office to schedule a meeting.

Sincerely,



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