November 27, 2024

Hon. Sylvia Jones
Deputy Minister / Minister of Health
Government of Ontario
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Hon. Mark Holland
Minister of Health
Government of Canada
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Dear Honourable Ministers:

Re: PPH Board of Health Support for the Walport Report and Sustained Investment and Reporting on Provincial Emergency Preparedness

On November 13, 2024, the Board of Health (BOH) for Peterborough Public Health expressed its support for the recommendations in the Health Canada report, *The Time to Act is Now: Report of the Expert Panel for the Review of the Federal Approach to Science Advice and Research Coordination*. The BOH also confirmed its belief that annual reporting on emergency preparedness activities is an essential mechanism for ensuring continued work and development of emergency preparedness capacity and exhorts the Ontario Ministry of Health to ensure that the legislature is kept informed of the status of emergency preparedness of the Province.

It has been five years since we learned of the outbreak in China that preceded the declaration of a global pandemic. We have learned significantly in public health and more broadly from these experiences and several reports have been authored summarizing the learnings and calling for sustained investment in emergency preparedness.

In 2022, the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health (CMOH) published the *2022 Annual Report - Being Ready: Ensuring Public Health Preparedness for Infectious Outbreaks and Pandemics* that included findings at the provincial level and a need for ongoing vigilance and reporting to the Ontario provincial legislature on pandemic readiness on an annual basis.

More recently, Health Canada published *The Time to Act is Now: Report of the Expert Panel for the Review of the Federal Approach to Science Advice and Research Coordination*, which takes a similar, yet higher level call to sustained investment and commitment to emergency preparedness including coordination of research and scientific advice across the country and close attention to addressing inequities and determinants of health.

As noted in the report, "The pandemic exposed and exacerbated the weaker elements of Canada's health research and science advisory systems. It also highlighted severe shortcomings of health data systems and an inability to conduct timely and adequate observational studies, including infectious disease surveillance, and clinical trials."[1]

Major findings of the Expert Panel Report (also referred to as the "Walport Report" after Panel Chair, Sir Michael Walport) include:

- Canada must act now to be prepared for the next health emergency;
- Greater pan-Canadian coordination of research and science advice is required;
- A greater focus needs to be placed on equity and addressing social and structural determinants of health;
- Indigenous health expertise must be embedded in research coordination and science advice processes.[2]

The 2022 CMOH report recommended annual reports, however, to date public health reporting to the Province has not changed and to the best of our knowledge the legislature has not yet received a report on preparedness activities for 2023 and 2024. Failing to implement the recommendation for ongoing reporting to the legislature on pandemic readiness would be a significant setback for both the public and public health.

Furthermore, the federal Walport Panel's recommendations, which emphasize the need to improve and sustain emergency preparedness in advance of future crises, underscore the importance of transparent, consistent reporting. Without this essential accountability, Ontario risks falling behind in its readiness for future emergencies, which could have dire consequences for public health and safety.

Respectfully,

Original signed by

Councillor Joy Lachica
Chair, Board of Health

cc: Dr. Kieran Moore, Ontario Chief Medical Officer of Health
        Local MPPs
        Local MPs
        Association of Local Public Health Agencies
        Ontario Boards of Health

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[1] Walport Report, p. 7
[2] Ibid, p. 7-8