May 30, 2017

**DELIVERED VIA E-MAIL & REGULAR MAIL**

Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care

10th Floor, Hepburn Block

80 Grosvenor Street

Toronto, ON M7A 2C4

Attention: The Honourable Eric Hoskins

 The Honourable Charles Sousa

 Premier Kathleen Wynne

 Office of the Minister

Dear Hon. Hoskins:

**Re: Urgent provincial action needed to address the potential health harms from the modernization of alcohol retail sales in Ontario**

On behalf of [NAME] Board of Health, I am writing to call on the Government of Ontario to fulfil its commitment (as announced in December 2015) to develop a comprehensive, province wide strategy to minimize harm and support the safe consumption of alcohol, in light of the expansion of alcohol sales in Ontario. Alcohol remains the most harmful drug in society, impacting tens of thousands of Ontarians every year.

Alcohol is no ordinary commodity; alcohol causes injury, addiction, disease, and social disruption and is one of the leading risk factors for disability and death in Canada. Alcohol has significant costs to the individual and society from both a health and financial perspective. These costs include health care, law enforcement, prevention, lost productivity and premature mortality. As such, a comprehensive, evidence-based approach is critical to limit these harms.

The Ontario Government has committed to social responsibility as it increases the availability of alcohol; however, actions by government since 2014 indicate that economic interests are superseding the health and well-being of Ontarians. Such developments include the increased availability of alcohol at up to 450 grocery stores, wine and cider in farmers’ markets, online sales of alcohol through the LCBO and the expansion of bars, restaurants and retail outlets permitted at alcohol manufacturing sites.

It is well established that increased alcohol availability leads to increased consumption and alcohol-related harms. A comprehensive, provincially led alcohol strategy can help mitigate the harms of alcohol. Effective policy interventions include socially responsible alcohol pricing, limits on the number of retail outlets and hours of sale, and restrictions on alcohol marketing. Strong evidence shows that these three policy levers are among the most effective interventions especially when paired with targeted interventions such as drinking and driving countermeasures, enforcement of the minimum legal drinking age as well as screening, brief intervention and referral activities.

In order to address the health and social harms of alcohol, and the impact of increased access, a comprehensive strategy is needed We are calling on the government to both fulfil its promise and prioritize the health and wellbeing of Ontarians by enacting a comprehensive, evidence-based alcohol strategy as soon as possible.