

August 2, 2016

The Honourable Kathleen Wynne  
Premier of Ontario  
Legislative Building  
Queen's Park  
Toronto ON M7A 1A1

Dear Premier Wynne,

As representatives of Ontario's public health sector, we are mandated to protect and promote the health and well-being of the entire population, including vulnerable and marginalized groups. The Ontario Public Health Standards (2008) state, in their opening pages, that "Addressing determinants of health and reducing health inequities are fundamental to the work of public health in Ontario".

It has been heartening to hear and see your government articulate a commitment to address the health inequities experienced by the indigenous peoples living in Ontario. As a sector of the health care system, we were delighted to note that Minister Hoskins has signaled his intent to address these inequities in his "Patients First" agenda for transformation.

In this light, we wish to congratulate your government for recent announcements that have helped set the stage for what we hope may become a turning point in our historical relations with indigenous peoples. We thank you for your public apology on May 30<sup>th</sup>, and the announcement of "The Journey Together" with its pledge of \$250 million over the next three years. Your strong pledge to "right the wrongs" that have been caused by the "systematic intergeneration injustices inflicted against indigenous communities" speaks directly to impact of the very powerful social determinants of racism, marginalization and deprivation. Without these fundamental changes, there will be no real or enduring change.

In keeping with this very powerful signal of hope and change, we were glad to see the renaming of Minister Zimmer's portfolio to "Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation". We look forward to November's Treaties Recognition Week as an opportunity for all of us in the public health sector to learn more about the treaties that have been established with the original inhabitants of this land we now call home.

And finally, we are grateful that the government has recognized the need to address public health and health promotion in its new First Nations Health Action Plan. We have been engaged in the piloting of new models for the provision of public health in the remote north, and we were glad to see the province recommit to supporting the evolution of these new models and their initiatives. The expansion of the Northern Fruit and Vegetable Program to 13,000 children in four additional public health units will address both food security and nutrition for those children and their families. We look forward to engaging with indigenous partners to strengthen their population health assessment and knowledge, as well as to collaborate, where ever appropriate on effective strategies to reduce chronic disease and improve health outcomes.

Premier, you are setting a bold new course for this province in its relations with indigenous peoples and this is not going unnoticed. Please accept our thanks for your inclusive vision for the province and your courageous leadership.

We express our enthusiasm for this agenda for change and our commitment to address these longstanding health inequities as an ally and partner.

Sincerely,



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Ellen Wodchis  
President  
Ontario Public Health Association



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Dr. Valerie Jaeger  
President  
Association of Local Public Health Agencies