

## **Delegation Request to the Ontario Ministry of Health**

### **Subject: Request for Increased Funding to Community Health Centres to Address the Wage Gap and Strengthen Rural Health Care**

The County of Elgin respectfully requests a delegation with the Ministry of Health to address a growing crisis affecting Community Health Centres (CHCs) across Ontario, especially those serving rural and under-resourced communities. We are requesting that the Ministry provide targeted and sustainable funding increases to CHCs to address a widening wage gap. This gap is threatening the long-term stability of the sector and limiting access to essential health services for some of Ontario's most vulnerable residents.

Community Health Centres are a vital part of Ontario's health system. They deliver comprehensive, team-based primary care and health promotion services, particularly for populations who face barriers to care. These include low-income individuals, newcomers, people in rural areas, Indigenous communities, and those experiencing homelessness or mental illness. CHCs use an integrated model that combines primary care (physicians, nurse practitioners, RNs, and RPNs) with social services, mental health care, harm reduction, and health education. This approach reduces pressure on emergency rooms and hospitals by providing timely and appropriate care at the community level.

In rural communities, CHCs often serve as the only accessible source of ongoing health care. This makes them essential to improving health equity and meeting basic care needs in underserved regions.

Despite their importance, CHCs are struggling to retain and attract skilled professionals. A significant wage gap has developed between CHC staff and workers in hospitals, Family Health Teams, and other parts of the publicly funded health system.

This wage gap has been caused by several provincial-level issues:

**Unequal Compensation Increases:** While recent government funding has supported wage enhancements for hospitals, long-term care, and other health organizations, CHCs have been left out of many of these measures.

**Bill 124 and Its Impact:** The legislation that capped wage increases for public sector workers had a long-term negative effect on CHC staff. Many of these professionals have seen their wages fall behind inflation and behind those in similar roles elsewhere.

**Flat Base Funding:** Most CHCs have not seen increases to their core operational budgets in years. As a result, they are unable to offer competitive wages or expand services to meet growing community needs.

CHCs are now losing nurses, mental health professionals, and other vital staff to employers who can offer higher salaries and better benefits. This issue is even more acute in rural areas where recruitment is more difficult and where residents have fewer

or no other health care options. In Elgin County, we have seen this first hand at the West Elgin Community Health Centre.

We ask the Ministry of Health to take immediate action to support the CHC sector by:

- Providing dedicated funding increases that allow CHCs to offer compensation that is competitive with other parts of the health system.
- Including CHCs in all future health sector wage enhancement and retention strategies.
- Updating base funding models to reflect inflation, population growth, and increased service demand.

Ensuring fair compensation for CHC staff is a necessary step toward maintaining health services in communities that need them most. Without action, the province risks further strain on hospitals, longer wait times, and worse outcomes for people with limited access to care.

We welcome the opportunity to present this delegation in person and to discuss how we can work together to protect and strengthen community health services across Ontario.

Thank you for your time and for your continued commitment to equitable health care in our province.