
For Information

REPORT TITLE: **Update on Health System Transformation and the Region of Peel's Advocacy Priorities**

FROM: Nancy Polsinelli, Commissioner of Health Services

OBJECTIVE

To provide an update on the Region of Peel's health system priority advocacy within the context and status of ongoing Provincial health system transformation as well as impacts from COVID-19.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- In the last year, Ontario has undergone significant reforms to key parts of its health system, including the creation of Ontario Health, Ontario Health Regional Portfolios, and development of local Ontario Health Teams. These changes have been further impacted by ongoing efforts by the Province to modernize both public health and emergency health services, amend legislation aimed at improving home and community care services, and launch a provincial mental health and addictions strategic plan.
 - During the COVID-19 pandemic, progress on health system reforms has been paused to address urgent and immediate pressures within the health system while other aspects adjusted to meet the urgency of need.
 - Throughout the process, the Region of Peel (Region) has remained engaged and continued to identify opportunities to advance key advocacy priorities as part of system reforms by working with other levels of government and sector partners in Peel.
 - While the Province continues to prioritize its response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Region continues to build on the community response through collaboration across key areas of need and advocating to the provincial government in order to advance the Region of Peel's own Health Services' priorities within broader health system reforms.
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DISCUSSION

1. Background

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the provincial government set out plans for transformative changes to Ontario's health care system. As previously reported to the October 17, 2019 Health System Integration Committee (HSIC) in the report "Health System Transformation and Regional Health Advocacy Priorities", the provincial government had set course through *Bill 74: The People's Health Care Act, 2019* to re-structure Ontario's health system.

While COVID-19 has forced the Region to pivot focus to more immediate needs and challenges, staff have also continued to maintain focus to support local system planning (i.e. Ontario Health Teams) and advance Regional priorities (i.e. Community Safety and Well-

Update on Health System Transformation and the Region of Peel's Advocacy Priorities

Being Plan). An overview of key provincial health system milestones is summarized in Appendix I.

2. Update on Health System Transformation and Regional Health Priorities

The COVID-19 pandemic has reprioritized Ministry reforms. The provincial government released an Economic and Fiscal Update ('Ontario Action Plan: Responding to COVID-19') on March 25, 2020, and its Budget ('Ontario's Action Plan: Protect, Support, Recover') on November 5, 2020 which have both laid out a comprehensive plan along with several investments totalling \$45 billion over three years to respond to the serious health and economic impacts of COVID-19. Key announcements and investments outlined by the Province centre on policy and funding measures to respond to new pandemic-related pressures on hospitals, long term care homes, public health units, paramedic services, primary care, mental health services, and a wide range of other health and human services.

The urgency of the pandemic has underscored the importance and value of strengthening local health services to keep residents both healthy and safe. The Region has contributed to the local response with a focus on opportunities for innovation, continuous quality improvement and integration.

a) Ontario Health and Ontario Health Teams

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Health (Ministry) established the Ontario Health Agency to assume governance and consolidation of several health agencies and restructured the 14 local health integration networks (LHINs) into five regional offices for Ontario Health. Peel is clustered within the Central Region of Ontario Health with Donna Cripps appointed the transitional lead and Chief Executive Officer.

Following Ministry approval of three local Ontario Health Teams (OHTs) in Peel, the Region has remained engaged with community partners in the full application process.

Currently, local OHTs have pivoted their focus to immediate COVID-19 response and the Region has remained engaged and supportive to key tasks including the coordination of personal protective equipment (PPE) supply distribution, community testing (paramedic services and public health have supported swabbing, and the Region has assisted with providing physical space to offer community testing), case and contact management, and other measures to mitigate COVID-19 impacts in Peel. In addition, the Region has supported local COVID-19 response with other health system partners through coordinated efforts with local hospitals and Ontario Health at the Integrated Response Table and local community and social service providers at the Community Response Table.

b) Home and Community Care

The Region has long advocated for the integration of home and community care services to reduce service wait times and ensure seamless care transitions from hospital to home, with added capacity to meet the needs of a growing aging population.

The *Connecting People to Home and Community Care Act, 2020*, introduced in February 2020 and passed in July 2020 transitioned LHINs to function as *Home and Community Care Support Services* responsible for interim transitional care coordination. These changes will likely have implications for how local home and community care

Update on Health System Transformation and the Region of Peel's Advocacy Priorities

services are coordinated and funded, including those offered through the Region (i.e. Adult Day Services (ADS)).

The modernized home and community care legislation is intended to remove barriers and restrictions to care in support of increased opportunities for innovation (i.e. virtual care) and improved access to services (i.e. integrated care and congregate settings). This provides a unique opportunity for the Region as a community service partner (i.e. ADS, community paramedicine) to support and innovate new models of care through OHT partnership that address gaps in care needs, such as those surfaced during the pandemic.

c) Long Term Care

In response to serious gaps and challenges exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Long-Term Care (LTC) launched an independent LTC COVID-19 Commission (Commission) in July 2020. In response to the Commission, staff prepared a submission, on behalf of the Region, in the report titled "The Region of Peel Submission to Ontario's Long-Term Care COVID-19 Commission" presented at the December 10, 2020 Regional Council meeting. The report offers insight and experiences from the Region's role as a municipal long term care operator and provides recommendations to address longstanding advocacy efforts related to enhanced funding, increased staffing and additional supports for seniors along the continuum of care. In the coming months staff will continue to engage relevant ministries, sector partners and leverage the work of the Commission to highlight opportunities for meaningful change, particularly for Peel, which has faced among the greatest impacts of COVID-19 compared to the rest of the province.

Recent provincial directions, including a \$540 million Long-Term Care Preparedness Plan to respond to COVID-19 and a commitment to increasing hours of direct care for residents over the next four years through a provincial staffing strategy will help to address challenges across the long term care sector. However, additional investments and supports to address immediate needs and service gaps in Peel are required. While the accelerated LTC bed development program to increase sector capacity is promising (as seen in the recent partnerships with Trillium Health Partners to build more beds in Mississauga, and LTC bed redevelopment for the Faith Manor LTC home in Brampton), provincial investment to support the Region of Peel's own municipally-operated homes, particularly Peel Manor, has yet to be achieved.

d) Mental Health and Addictions

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing pressures in Ontario's Mental Health and Addictions system and shed light on ongoing challenges across the sector. A call to action by Council was issued to address historical funding needs in Peel as highlighted in a June 25, 2020 report titled "Responding to the Mental Health and Addictions Needs in Peel". The report also acknowledged ongoing work by the Region and community mental health and addictions system that have partnered to mobilize resources and integration of services, including leveraging Peel's Community Safety and Well-Being (CSWB) Plan, the Region's Community Response Table, and local Ontario Health Teams. In addition, Council passed Resolution 2020-507 (June 25, 2020) directly requesting enhancements to funding for mobile crisis rapid response teams (MCRRT) and other sustainable improvements for supporting people experiencing a mental health crisis.

Update on Health System Transformation and the Region of Peel's Advocacy Priorities

In response, staff are working through community partnerships to support locally-driven advocacy and innovative solutions to address immediate needs in Peel. The Region's work to date has included targeted communication to advance opportunities to improve system capacity by raising concerns of underfunding, service disparities, and waitlists with provincial government leadership (including at the Association of Municipalities of Ontario 2020 Annual Conference with the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions), and with Peel Members of Provincial Parliament, through a roundtable hosted by the Member of Provincial Parliament (MPP) for Mississauga-Malton, Mr. Deepak Anand, and with Ms. Natalia Kusendova, MPP for Mississauga-Centre.

During COVID-19, the Region has also provided additional health and social support to Peel's homeless population through isolation and recovery programs developed by a local collaborative and intersectoral partnership of primary care, public health, mental health, community care and social service providers. Further, through targeted engagement of Ministry staff, the Region continues to highlight existing priorities challenged through the pandemic including the need for enhanced mobile outreach, support for frontline workers, capacity to support self-isolation for precariously housed with mental health and addictions, and issues related to domestic violence.

Future development of the provincial mental health strategy, the "Roadmap to Wellness: A Plan to Build Ontario's Mental Health and Addictions System" (Roadmap) is pending. Since the strategy was released in March 2020, the government has committed an additional \$176 million to support its implementation. The Province also announced further funding for the child and youth mental health sector as well as mobile crisis supports in Fall 2020. Staff continue to work with community partners to understand how these investments will benefit Peel and more importantly, raise awareness to gaps and areas of targeted investments that will address the need in our community.

e) Modernization of Public Health and Paramedic Services

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry established consultations directed at modernizing local public health and emergency health services. Two separate reports at the January 23, 2020 Regional Council meeting detailed modernization consultations and separate submissions by the Region to these consultations.

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, the Ministry paused most modernization activities to focus on immediate public health and health system measures to protect Ontarians. Ministry leadership have indicated that renewed consultations and modernization efforts will resume when pressures from the COVID-19 pandemic have eased, although exact timelines have not yet been confirmed.

In November 2020, the Auditor General, Bonnie Lysyk, tabled a Special Report in the Legislative Assembly on COVID-19 Preparedness and Management. This report highlighted important recommendations following an audit of processes related to emergency and outbreak management, COVID-19 testing, case management, and contact tracing; and communications across all levels of government, including at the local health unit level. Staff continue to monitor the Provincial Government's response to the Auditor General's findings and will consider implications for public health modernization.

3. Future Direction and Next Steps

As the province navigates the second wave of COVID-19 and plans for recovery, it is expected that health system transformation will continue to adapt and reflect Ministry directives and lessons learned during COVID-19 pandemic.

Longer-term funding remains a concern for the Region's health services. The Ministry announced funding pandemic-related pressures in both public health and paramedic services. The Minister of Health, in an address at the Annual Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO), also indicated that provincial share of land ambulance funding would increase by five per cent in 2020-2021.

Peel has been one of the communities most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic in Ontario, which has largely been driven by population and demographic factors. Peel region has had the second largest number of COVID-19 cases in Ontario and has been identified as one of the communities with some of the highest rates in Canada. The Province has announced additional funding for Peel Public Health including funding for 64 additional school-focused nurses and funding to increase case management and contact tracing capacity. The Region continues to advocate for COVID-related funding to support the local public health response and broader health system to respond to community needs.

In the months ahead, Regional health services will continue to prioritize its response to COVID-19 with community partners. A leading example of this commitment is the work currently underway through the CSWB Plan that, at its core, addresses the disparity, vulnerabilities and challenge that many residents are experiencing throughout the pandemic. This and many other examples of collaborative partnerships including the Integrated Response Table and Community Response Table during COVID-19, continue to be central to the broader goal to support system transformation that meets the needs of Peel residents and bridges existing gaps in services or supports.

CONCLUSION

Ontario is undergoing significant reforms to key parts of its health system. While progress in some parts of the system has been delayed due to COVID-19, the pandemic has created new opportunities and highlighted the urgency for a region-wide response to improving the local health system. Through collaboration and partnerships, as highlighted through the work with OHTs, CSWB plan and other system tables, the Region of Peel continues to make important contributions toward local health system reforms and advocate for the needs of residents within the new and evolving local health system.

APPENDICIES

Appendix I – Key Provincial Health System Milestones in 2020

For further information regarding this report, please contact Brian Laundry, Director, Strategic Policy and Performance, brian.laundry@peelregion.ca.

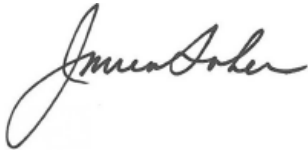
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Update on Health System Transformation and the Region of Peel's Advocacy Priorities

Reviewed and/or approved in workflow by:

Department Commissioner and Division Director.

Final approval is by the Chief Administrative Officer.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Baker", is positioned above a horizontal line.

J. Baker, Chief Administrative Officer