



REPORT FOR ACTION

Ontario Government's Proposed Changes to the Provincial Health System

Date: March 25, 2019

To: Board of Health

From: Medical Officer of Health

Wards: All

SUMMARY

On February 26, 2019, the Deputy Premier and Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, announced an Ontario strategy that includes legislative, operational and policy changes to how the provincial health care system is currently managed and delivered.

This report is in response to a City Council request on February 26, 2019 that the Medical Officer of Health report to the April 8, 2019 Board of Health meeting on implications of the proposed policy and legislative changes to the provincial health care system, as recently announced by the Government of Ontario.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Medical Officer of Health recommends that:

1. The Board of Health receive this report for information.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There is no financial impact associated with this report.

DECISION HISTORY

At its February 26, 2019 Council Meeting, City Council adopted a motion without notice made by Councillor and Board of Health Chair, Joe Cressy, to request the Medical Officer of Health to report to the next Board of Health meeting on the implication of the proposed health system changes made by the Government of Ontario.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2019.MM3.18>

COMMENTS

On February 26, 2019, the provincial Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, and Deputy Premier, announced an Ontario strategy that includes legislative, operational and policy changes to how the provincial health care system is currently managed and delivered.

The details of the plan are limited, but information released to date by the provincial government states the plan will be phased in over a number of years and will focus on the following health services: primary care, hospital, home and community care, palliative care, residential and long-term care, and mental health and addictions treatment¹.

Overview of proposed Changes:

The provincial government has stated its intentions are to reduce patient wait lists and improve access to health care services and the patient experience through the following four key deliverables:

1. Creation of Ontario Health (an agency) which will act as a central point of accountability and oversight for the health care system through Ontario Health;
2. Creation of Ontario Health Teams which will be groups of local health care providers who will organize to provide services to patients
3. Expanding access to digital tools, including online health records and virtual care options for patients; and
4. Providing patients, families, and caregivers support with navigating the health care system, 24/7.

1. Ontario Health (agency)

On February 26, the Ontario government introduced Bill 74 - The People's Health Care Act - which, if passed, would establish a central point of accountability and oversight for the health care system by creating a single agency, Ontario Health that would integrate multiple provincial agencies and specialized programs and services.

If passed, the legislation would result in the consolidation of the following health organizations:

- Cancer Care Ontario
- Health Quality Ontario
- E-health Ontario
- Trillium Gift of Life Network (organ & tissue donation)
- Health Shared Services Ontario
- HealthForce Ontario Marketing and Recruitment Agency
- 14 Local Health Integration Networks (LHINs).

Ontario Health would be governed by a provincially appointed Board of Directors, which would assume oversight of the agency and be accountable to the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. As of March 8, 2019, the Minister released an early slate of the Board of Directors nominees which would also constitute the boards that oversee all agencies listed above, including 14 individual LHINs².

2. Ontario Health Teams

Under the proposed plan, the provincial government announced the creation of Ontario Health Teams which would see local health care providers organize themselves into coordinated teams to provide services to patients. These teams would take on the work of transitioning patients from one provider to another, and across the continuum of care including receiving care in different geographic locations.

According to the provincial announcement, Ontario Health Teams would also service specialized patient populations such as speciality pediatrics or patients with complex health needs. It is anticipated that there could be 30 to 40 local health teams across the province at maturity³.

The government also announced that Ontario Health Teams will be funded and held accountable for improving patient experience and people's health. Details on what is meant by improving the patient experience and people's health, and how these teams will be accountable have not yet been provided, but the government announcement indicates that these goals will be supported through improved access to secure digital tools, including online health records and virtual care options for patients⁴.

3. Access to secure digital tools - health records and virtual care options

As part of the strategy announced by the Ontario government in February, there is a commitment to expanding digital tools for health care providers for patient benefit and efficiency.

The government's position is, if digital tools (including electronic medical records and virtual care) are expanded and modernized, the system will perform more efficiently with health care providers being able to access to patient information and specialized advice and clinical supports when needed; and patients being able to access their medical records and virtual care options⁵.

4. Navigating the health care system 24/7

Through the Ontario Health Teams, patients, family members and care givers would have help in navigating the health care system 24/7. Details on how 24/7 access will be provided are unknown at this time but may be related to the government's commitment to expanding digital tools that would be made available to health care providers and patients, such as electronic medical records and virtual care.

Additional components of the Ontario Government's Plan

In addition to the four key changes to the health system announced by the provincial government on February 26, there are two additional components the government has committed to:

1. Single Supply Chain Management Model - This model will allow providers of care and patients to be engaged on the procurement of medical products and services⁶. It is unknown where the supply-chain model will be housed and which body would have administrative oversight (the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care or the new Ontario Health agency).
2. Minister's Patient and Family Advisory Council - This council will be turned in to a permanent advisory body to provide advice on key health care priorities that impact patient care and experience⁷.

Impact on health care service delivery in the City and programs administered by Toronto Public Health:

At this time, there are no further details related to the proposed agency and creation of Ontario Health Teams that would allow for a comprehensive analysis of the potential impact on health services in the City or those administered by Toronto Public Health (TPH). What is known, is that the strategy reiterated the government's commitment to investing \$3.8 billion in mental health and addictions treatment, and 30,000 long-term care beds over 10 years.

We also know that the proposed provincial changes do not involve restructuring or consolidating public health units or public health programming and services in to the proposed Ontario Health agency or Ontario Health Teams. Nor does the strategy include changes to municipal paramedic services management⁸.

On March 6, 2019, Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health sent a memo to all 35 Medical Officers of Health across the province reiterating that the main focus of the government's plan is to improve the patient experience and foster better connected care. The memo also states there is a significant role for the public health sector to play in the larger system as a valuable partner, given public health's mandate to prevent illness and protect and promote the health of the whole population, and its role in supporting the sustainability of the health system by keeping people healthy. The memo also advised that more information will be communicated in the following weeks and months as the government moves forward on its plan.

There have been concerns raised about health system funding and service delivery under this proposed new model - which has been a traditional role of the LHINs. At this time, the government has stated that the 14 LHINs and their functions will be "reorganized under the Ontario Health agency. This transition would roll out in phases to ensure the continuity of patient care"⁹. In follow up to this, on March 12, 2019, the LHINs communicated online and to partner organizations (including TPH) that home care will continue as before the announcement and there will be no changes to long-term care home placement.

Toronto Public Health receives some funding from the Toronto Central LHIN, including funding for one FTE (methadone case manager) and harm reduction medical supplies and equipment (approximately \$113,000) and funding for Indigenous cultural sensitivity training (approximately \$20,000). There has been no information forthcoming on the future of these two funding initiatives, however, on March 12, the LHINs also communicated that for LHIN-funded health service providers and contracted service provider organizations, the existing processes, contracts, agreements and reporting obligations remain the same.

The consolidation of the 20 health organizations under the proposed Ontario Health agency will result in the elimination of the senior management structures. This was announced by the Premier on March 13, 2019. As part of the announcement, the Premier stated that the money saved through the elimination of senior positions will be reinvested in health care services and front-line staff. It is unknown when changes to the management structures of the 20 health organizations will take effect.

The provincial budget will be released on April 11, 2019. Toronto Public Health staff will monitor and review the 2019 Ontario budget for any additional details about the proposed changes and decisions that may impact health service delivery and public health. In addition, TPH will closely monitor the roll out of the legislative, operational and policy changes proposed by the provincial government and will assess the impact of these changes when more details become available. Any changes and/or impacts identified will be reported to the Board of Health.

CONTACT

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SIGNATURE

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REFERENCES

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2. Minister of Health and Long-Term Care (March 8, 2019). News Release: Ontario Building on Plan to Connect Public Health Care System for Patients - Ontario Health Board of Directors Named. Retrieved March 12, 2019, from: <https://news.ontario.ca/mohltc/en/2019/03/ontario-building-on-plan-to-connect-public-health-care-system-for-patients.html>
3. Ontario Association of Municipalities (February 26, 2019). Policy Updates: Ontario Announces New Health Care Plan. Retrieved March 6, from <http://www.amo.on.ca/AMO-Content/Policy-Updates/2019/GovernmentAnnouncesNewHealthCarePlan>
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