

May 12, 2020

Hon. Christine Elliott
Ministry of Health
5th Floor, 777 Bay St.
Toronto, ON M7A 2J3

RE: Health policy reforms during the COVID-19 pandemic

Dear Minister Elliott,

I am writing to provide you with recommendations from the Ontario Chamber of Commerce's Health Policy Council. Launched on April 7, 2020, the Council is composed of a diverse cross-section of members. Its mandate is to exchange ideas and provide government with timely and actionable policy recommendations.

The Council recognizes that the Province is focused on changes to the health care system that meet the quadruple aim as outlined in *Ontario Health Teams: Guidance for Health Care Providers and Organizations*. These objectives are: 1) better patient and caregiver experience; 2) better patient and population health outcomes; 3) better value and efficiency; and 4) better provider experience.

During the pandemic, there have been many reforms to health policy and care delivery in Ontario. The following is a list of changes that the OCC's Health Policy Council believes meets these four objectives. We therefore encourage the Province to make the following items permanent as they are positive for both patients and Ontario's healthcare system:

- Allowing Ontarians to access lab test results through the new COVID-19 portal;
- Enabling a virtual care policy and financial framework for the delivery of primary care services and OHIP billing;
- Allowing drug applications, like the Trillium Drug Application, to be submitted by fax or email, rather than mail, and the adjustment of the formula to include 2020 income information to calculate deductibles;
- Reimbursing pharmacists for patient MedsChecks that are performed virtually or by phone to reduce unnecessary in-person interactions;
- Updated guidelines for long-term care facilities regarding capacity and safety for residents and health care workers;
- Procurement processes to ensure adequate supply of personal protective equipment (PPE) for frontline workers and health care providers; and
- Engaging innovators and other stakeholders to develop solutions that address specific health system challenges, as in the COVID-19 Rapid Research Fund.

We also appreciate the Ontario Government's \$12 million investment in emergency funding to expand online and virtual mental health supports during the pandemic. This funding should be sustained for an interim period and for specific groups like frontline workers.

Taken together, preserving these changes in the COVID-19-era and beyond would introduce efficiencies, streamline processes, make better use of technology, and improve patient access to their own health data.

These unprecedented times have showcased the ingenuity of Ontario's innovators, entrepreneurs, and the business community at large. Across the province, countless businesses have stepped-up, responded to the province's request for support and developed critical products in real time.

We would also like to commend the Province for developing temporary command tables to disseminate information and provide direction to regional centres. The OCC's Health Policy Council believes that permanent collaboration between the provincial government and Ontario business could be installed. The command table structure could be used to inform future governance and policies for Ontario Health and Ontario Health Teams.

Accordingly, the OCC's Health Policy Council applauds your government's \$20 million investment as part of its COVID-19 Rapid Research Fund. The Fund allows post-secondary institutions, research hospitals, and non-profit research institutes to apply for funding that will advance medical research and help develop tools and resources to combat the virus. We encourage the government to keep in mind that, once institutions receive initial funding, they will need support to scale and meet regulatory approvals. This period has also demonstrated the Province's ability to keep pace with the speed at which business moves. Ensuring red tape and regulatory barriers are kept at bay could help ensure that innovative, made-in-Ontario solutions and firms remain in the province.

We encourage the Government of Ontario to continue to invest in and support alternative care options as it relates to our supply chains, virtual care, digital health, diagnostics/labs, Ontario Health Teams, and our workforce. As shared partners in care, the OCC looks forward to contributing input in these functional areas over the coming months.

Sincerely,

Rocco Rossi
President and CEO
Ontario Chamber of Commerce

CC: The Honourable Doug Ford, Premier of Ontario
The Honourable Michael Tibollo, Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions
Helen Angus, Deputy Minister of Health