

April 15, 2025

Hon. Sylvia Jones
Minister of Health
5th Flr, 777 Bay St.
Toronto, Ontario M7A 2J3

Hon. Vic Fedeli
Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade
18th Flr, 777 Bay St.
Toronto, Ontario M7A 1S5

RE: Ontario Business Imperative: Investing in Healthy, Sustainable Communities

Dear Ministers Jones and Fedeli:

Congratulations on your re-election and renewed mandate to protect Ontario's economy and enhance its competitiveness. The Ontario Chamber of Commerce (OCC) looks forward to working with you and your government to drive inclusive, sustainable economic growth.

Today, I write on behalf of our [Health Policy Council](#), a group of business leaders from a wide range of health-related sectors, including pharmaceutical, health care services, insurance and benefits, and post-secondary education, to advance opportunities to strengthen Ontario's health and life sciences ecosystem.

Ontario's health sector is navigating a period of significant uncertainty, driven by ongoing trade disputes and rising demand for patient services. The government has taken important steps to address these challenges through initiatives such as the *Plan for Convenient and Connected Care*, the *Roadmap to Wellness*, and the *Primary Care Action Plan*. These strategies include meaningful investments in system transformation, mental health and addictions, and primary care access.

However, persistent health human resources (HHR) shortages continue to strain the sector's ability to deliver timely and equitable care. Critical health infrastructure has not kept pace with population growth—particularly in rural, remote, northern, and Indigenous communities—while the substance-use crisis continues to place long-term socio-economic pressures on communities across the province. These gaps must be addressed to build a truly resilient and responsive health system for all Ontarians.

As the legislature resumes, the Ontario Chamber urges your government to build upon recent efforts and take the following steps to safeguard our health care sector and protect our communities:

1. **Supporting life sciences and health innovation:** Ontario is home to more than 2,000 life sciences companies contributing \$65.2 billion every year in GDP and supporting over 72,000 high-paying jobs. There is an opportunity to capitalize on Ontario's life sciences advantage and ensure timely access to life-saving care.
 - o Collaborate with industry to develop strategies to ensure a reliable supply and inventory of healthcare supplies in the event of long-term disruptions.
 - o Create a permanent mandate for the Life Sciences Council to oversee and provide advice on the implementation of the Life Sciences Strategy, as well as the development and implementation of the Health Innovation Pathway.
 - o Adopt a value-based procurement approach that includes lifecycle costs, innovation, economic development, supply chain resiliency, and other long-term outcomes.
 - o Advocate to the federal government that medicines, ancillary products, medical technologies and their inputs be excluded from any retaliatory trade measures, recognizing the interconnected nature of Canadian and U.S. supply chains and their importance to the health of Ontarians.

2. **Improving health infrastructure:** Current capital project timelines—often spanning 7 to 10 years—are no longer adequate to meet the pace of population growth and evolving healthcare needs. Strategic and accelerated investments are especially critical in rural, remote, northern, and Indigenous communities, where longstanding infrastructure gaps continue to limit access to care.
 - o Prioritize strategic capital investments and streamline planning and approval timelines to accelerate the delivery of health infrastructure, including hospitals, long-term care homes, community health centres, and culturally appropriate care facilities.
 - o Accelerate the development of a digital health data system to support innovation in data collection, sharing, and reporting between patients, providers, governments, and industry, with robust privacy protections. This includes leveraging the Ontario Health Data Platform to increase data accessibility and transparency to facilitate standardization and information dissemination in support.
 - o Remove barriers between provinces to streamline regulatory approvals and enhance health data integration, clinical trials, technology adoption, procurement policies and credentialing of health professionals.

3. **Strengthening health systems for long-term resiliency:** There is an urgent need to expand access to primary care to reduce reliance on emergency departments, ease pressure on hospitals, and support a more efficient, cost-effective, and patient-centered system.
 - o Expand team-based care across the province, collaborating with Ontario Health Teams, Family Health Teams, Nurse Practitioner-Led Clinics, Indigenous and equity-deserving communities, municipalities, and other stakeholders to develop innovative local service delivery models.

- Move to multi-year funding models to increase equity and access to affordable and qualitative care across regions and communities.
 - Increase access to innovative and life-saving medications and community-based care models to meet ongoing, evolving and diverse patient needs.
4. **Addressing Ontario’s health human resources (HHR) crisis:** Over 2.5 million Ontarians are without a family physician—a number projected to rise to 1 in 5 within two years. This growing shortage of health human resources, compounded by gaps in the talent pipeline, is placing significant strain on system capacity and jeopardizing timely access to care and patient outcomes.
- Leverage digital health technology and innovations to alleviate HHR pressures, including supporting the responsible adoption of AI for health-related applications, to augment clinical decision-making and workplace efficiencies.
 - Build on investments in doctors and nurses with actions to ensure an adequate supply of pharmacists, psychologists, physiotherapists, medical radiation technologists, social workers, medical and lab technicians, dental hygienists and assistants, chiropractors and other allied health professionals.
 - Support the efficient implementation of Ontario’s Primary Care Action Plan, with a focus on sustainable recruitment and retention strategies to strengthen primary care, attract family physicians, nurse practitioners, and allied health professionals to underserved rural areas, and enable providers to work to their full scope through expanded practice initiatives.
5. **Improving mental health and substance use supports:** Demand for mental health and addiction supports remains high, with growing waitlists, a worsening opioid and substance use crisis, and increased pressure on small businesses to provide employee mental health resources. Addressing this “echo pandemic” requires strengthened system capacity, integrated community-based care, and accessible supports that respond to both individual and workforce needs.
- Establish a province-wide, consolidated database to track mental health, addiction, and homelessness cases and treatment accessibility. This would improve service coordination, inform evidence-based decisions, and build on models like the federal Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS) and the Ontario Mental Health Reporting System.
 - Conduct a comprehensive cost assessment of mental health, addiction, and homelessness challenges, including public expenditures (e.g., hospitals, EMS, police) and private sector impacts such as workforce strain and customer safety concerns.
 - Expand early-stage health supports for individuals experiencing mental health, addiction, or housing challenges by prioritizing prevention, early intervention, and integrated care through frameworks like the *Roadmap to Wellness*.

- Increase treatment capacity for mental health and addiction services to reduce wait times, meet rising demand, and ensure timely access to care across the province.

As we deal with shifting economic headwinds, there has never been a greater need for a comprehensive economic growth strategy that supports the industries of today and strengthens foundation for the industries of tomorrow. The OCC and its members are committed to working collaboratively with your ministries to achieve our shared goal of inclusive, sustainable prosperity.

Sincerely,



Daniel Tisch
President & CEO
Ontario Chamber of Commerce

cc.

Hon. Vijay Thanigasalam, Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions
Robyn Sacoon, Chair, OCC Health Policy Council & Vice President, Public Affairs, BD - Canada