

March 19, 2020

The Hon. Doug Ford
Premier of Ontario
Legislative Building
Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A1

Re: Urgent Need for Incident Management System for COVID-19 Pandemic Response

Dear Premier Ford:

On behalf of the province's 141 public hospitals, the Ontario Hospital Association (OHA) thanks you and your government for your recent actions to ensure Ontario is as prepared as possible to manage the COVID-19 pandemic.

As you know, on March 13, 2020, the OHA recommended that your government anticipate the need to invoke all emergency management powers available under Ontario legislation, particularly as they relate to the health care system, health care workers and the distribution of resources. We're grateful to your government for declaring a state of emergency earlier this week. This essential step has provided your government with the broad-ranging powers to act in the interest of public health and safety. Having declared a public emergency under the *Emergency Management Civil Protection Act (EMCPA)*, the government must now continue this momentum with continued decisive and coordinated action involving relevant provincial players.

Ontario is now at a critical juncture – moving well beyond prevention and screening to active management of a pandemic. In our view, Ontario now has an urgent need for a single point of cross government oversight, management and decision-making for the many issues facing hospitals, other health service providers and wider public services involved in the pandemic response. A centralized, cross-ministry response by the Government of Ontario to COVID-19 is now essential in order to protect the health and well-being of the people of Ontario.

Activating an Incident Management System (IMS) will ensure a rapid, coordinated and efficient decision-making process at the provincial level. As you are aware, the EMCPA sets out a clear process for the management of public emergencies, delineating the authority of the MOH and other ministries to act in concert as the government responds to a crisis. A formal cross-ministry Incident Command Team including the Ministers of Health, Long Term Care, Labour, Education, and Finance, among others, is now necessary to ensure organized, dynamic and real time discussion and swift decision-making in the face of the pandemic threat.

Further, in our view, the appointment of an independent Incident Commander, or Chair, is necessary to lead day-to-day management of the IMS and to ensure that response actions are prioritized accordingly. In the case of the COVID-19 pandemic, our view is that an Incident Commander with extensive experience in health services delivery, especially clinical operations and management, as well as previous leadership experience within the broader public sector is warranted.

Within a properly constructed Incident Management System, the roles, responsibilities and accountabilities of Ontario Health, the Ministry of Health and Public Health must remain at the heart of provincial efforts. We are very grateful for the leadership of public officials across these areas of responsibility. Their ongoing involvement within a new Incident Management Structure is essential to the effectiveness of provincial efforts.

By way of illustration, in our view the lack of clarity on the issue of health care worker travel and return to work illustrates the urgent need for an Incident Management System (IMS).

Since January the OHA has been requesting that the government provide clear direction to health care providers on this issue. Early efforts were directed primarily on prevention and screening and it was not until the eve of March break that Ontarians were publicly advised to avoid all non-essential travel outside of Canada. It was only today that the government issued its policy on health care workers and return-to-work practices. The OHA believes strongly that this example makes clear the urgent need for an IMS. Better, more timely and effective decisions will result.

Premier, the OHA remains fully supportive of the government and our health system partners in our collective capability to meet head-on the difficulties posed by this unprecedented public emergency. As we indicated in our previous letter, swift decisions made today can have an enormous effect on mitigating the impact of COVID-19 on people, patients and health care workers.

Please do not hesitate to contact us at any time for additional information. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Altaf Stationwala
Board Chair



Anthony Dale
President and CEO

CC: All Hospital CEOs and Board Chairs
Steven Davidson, Secretary of the Cabinet
Jamie Wallace, Chief of Staff to the Premier
Mark Lawson, Deputy Chief of Staff to the Premier
Helen Angus, Deputy Minister of Health
Matthew Anderson, President and CEO, Ontario Health
Dr. David Williams, Chief Medical Officer of Health
The Hon. Christine Elliott, Minister of Health
Heather Watt, Chief of Staff to the Minister of Health
Mario Di Tommaso, Deputy Solicitor General, Community Safety
The Hon. Sylvia Jones, Solicitor General
David Garland, Chief of Staff to the Solicitor General
Greg Orencsak, Deputy Minister of Finance
The Hon. Rod Phillips, Minister of Finance
Andrew Sidnell, Chief of Staff to the Minister of Finance