

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

January 10, 2017

The Honourable Eric Hoskins
Minister of Health and Long-Term Care
10th Floor, Hepburn Block
Queen's Park
Toronto, ON M7A 2C4

Re: Health System Capacity Pressures

Dear Minister Hoskins,

On behalf of the Ontario Hospital Association (OHA) and our 145 member hospitals, I am writing to draw your attention to the significant capacity challenges being faced by the hospital sector and the likelihood of these challenges being exacerbated in the weeks ahead as flu season approaches its peak.

Emergency departments (EDs) are a critical barometer of the functioning of the health care system, and the OHA has been monitoring this data closely. In recent months, ED wait times have been the longest on record since Ontario started measuring wait times nine years ago. Wait times for patients waiting to be admitted to hospital from the ED increased 13 per cent from this time last year. As flu season progresses, there will undoubtedly be increased congestion in hospital emergency departments and longer-lengths of stay in acute, complex continuing care, mental health and rehabilitation beds in the winter months.

Infectious disease experts have warned that H3N2 is the dominant influenza strain circulating in Canada so far this season, and that it is a particularly severe form of flu that's associated with increased hospitalizations. Public Health Ontario reported 193 cases of influenza during the latest surveillance period (Dec. 11-Dec. 17). In the season to date, 165 hospitalizations and three deaths have been reported among laboratory-confirmed influenza cases.

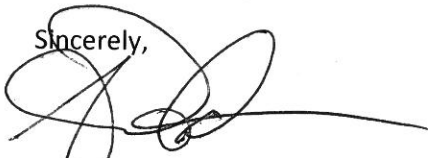
Currently, the number of patients waiting in Ontario hospitals for care in a more appropriate setting (alternate level of care, or ALC) is also on the rise. Fifteen per cent of patients are waiting in hospital beds to receive care elsewhere in the system, according to evidence from Cancer Care Ontario's Access to Care Report. This is a challenge that is growing, increasing 12 per cent over the last year. While Ontario hospitals and the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (Ministry) had been achieving success in ensuring that these patients receive the most appropriate care, an aging and growing population has led to new challenges in caring for these complex patients.

The OHA has been working closely with the Ministry to monitor these trends and to prepare for a potential surge in demand. In September, the OHA distributed a survey to our members to better understand unused bed and space capacity. The results were shared with the Ministry to determine how quickly hospitals could open unused beds/space, with additional funding, to help mitigate any potential growth in ALC patients. The OHA also supported the Ministry in hosting a roundtable for stakeholders that examined ALC solutions related to mental health/behavioural issues. Our members, including Ontario Shores and the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH), shared lessons they've learned respecting community housing and helping to transition hard-to-place patients. Finally, recognizing in-year the need to fund more capacity and address wait times in hospitals across the province, in the Fall Economic Statement released this past November, the Ontario government provided an additional \$140 million for hospital services.

Moving forward, the OHA is firmly committed to working with the Ministry and Local Health Integration Networks (LHINs) to address the health system capacity challenge. The evidence gathered to date clearly demonstrates the need for the Government of Ontario to make further, long-term investments in health service across the continuum in the 2017 Budget. Over the short term, the OHA will remain in close contact with Ministry officials in order to closely monitor health system capacity and discuss additional efforts that might be necessary to ease pressures through the remainder of the winter.

Please do not hesitate to contact me directly to discuss this matter further. I can be reached at 416-205-1348 or adale@oha.com.

Sincerely,



Anthony Dale
President and CEO

CC: Dr. Bob Bell, Deputy Minister, MOHLTC
Melissa Farrell, Assistant Deputy Minister, MOHLTC
Derrick Araneda, Chief of Staff to the Minister, MOHLTC
OHA Board of Directors
All Ontario Hospital Board Chairs and CEOs