

May 7, 2020

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy
President of the Treasury Board
Treasury Board Secretariat
Rm 4320, 99 Wellesley St W.
Toronto, ON M7A 1W3

Re: Pandemic Pay

Dear Minister Bethlenfalvy;

On behalf of Ontario's public hospitals, the Ontario Hospital Association (OHA) thanks the government for its leadership in taking action to continue to ensure that our front-line healthcare workers are supported through the provision of temporary pandemic pay.

While many of our front-line employees appreciate this support, we know that many other front-line and critical hospital employees may not ultimately be eligible for temporary pandemic pay based on the announcements made to date. This approach has had a major, counter-productive impact on the morale of staff, creating haves and have nots amongst our valued employees at a time when we all need to work together towards a common aim. The reality is that all employees in hospitals are contributing in significant ways to efforts against COVID-19 and the efforts of all employees are valued by hospitals and should be recognized. The initial announcements from government suggested a willingness to express its gratitude for the efforts of hospital employees and it is our hope that the government will take immediate steps to ensure that the contributions of all hospital employees are properly recognized.

These morale concerns are compounded by certain practical realities regarding the implementation of pandemic pay. While the government's recent Order amending the *Protecting a Sustainable Public Sector for Future Generations Act, 2019* temporarily removes limitations on pay increases greater than one percent to allow for temporary COVID-19 related payments, little direction and guidance has been provided regarding hospital authority to allocate this pay to the limited/specific hospital employees that have been identified by government to date.

Under collective agreements and the *Labour Relations Act*, hospitals as employers are not able to unilaterally provide a wage increase to unionized employees without negotiation with their union. Given the understandable concerns of employees not currently eligible for pandemic pay, and the need to recognize the contributions of all hospital employees, it is highly unlikely that these unions will agree to provide pandemic pay to only a subset of their membership.

As a result, hospitals may face grievances or unfair labour practice complaints from unions should they implement pandemic pay based only on the list of eligible employees that has been determined by government. Given the nature of labour relations matters, one attempt to do so at just a single organization will create a precedent across the sector and expand its application to all hospitals.

We urge your ministry to fully address this growing morale problem. The government has an opportunity to officially recognize the efforts of all hospital employees during this emergency. Should that not occur, given the significant morale concerns and practical realities outlined above, hospitals will have no choice but implement pandemic pay in the manner we have recommended to government. Given previous assurances made by the Government of Ontario that the province will fund all necessary costs related to the COVID-19 pandemic response, it is our expectation that the province will fund any and all COVID-19 related payments to any hospital employee, regardless as to whether those employees were originally identified as eligible by the government.

Thank you Minister for your urgent attention to this most important matter.

Sincerely,



Anthony Dale
President & CEO

CC: James Wallace, Chief of Staff, Premier
Mark Lawson, Deputy Chief of Staff, Premier
Helen Angus, Deputy Minister of Health
Hon. Christine Elliott, Minister of Health
Leif Malling, Chief of Staff, Minister of Health
Laurel Brazill, Director, Stakeholder Relations, Minister of Health
Kevin French, Deputy Minister, Treasury Board Secretariat
Karl Baldauf, Chief of Staff, President of the Treasury Board
Jeff Parker, Executive Director of Policy & Expenditure
Management
Ontario Cabinet Members
OHA Board of Directors
Ontario Hospital CEOs