



January 22, 2016

Honourable Dr. Eric Hoskins  
Minister of Health and Long-Term Care  
Ministry of Health and Long Term Care  
10th Floor Hepburn Block,  
80 Grosvenor  
Toronto Ontario M7A 2C4

Dear Minister Hoskins,

On behalf of the member associations of the Ontario Primary Care Council (OPCC), we congratulate you on *Patients First: A proposal to strengthen patient-centred health care in Ontario*. We collectively applaud your promise to put patients at the centre of your decisions. We are particularly pleased to see “timely access to primary care and seamless links between primary care and other services” as one of the four core proposals. We also welcome the recognition of the needs of diverse Ontarians through a health equity lens and the importance of determinants of health as central to your vision to put patients first.

The Deputy Minister, at his meeting with a number of our primary care associations on December 17, 2015, challenged us to develop a common response. This letter provides our initial, united response to the proposal. In mid-March, we will provide a more detailed collective submission on a number of key areas.

We look forward to your upcoming consultations, both provincially and with our members in their regions. We ask for inclusivity, transparency and consistency in the consultation process, as well as overarching values to guide the ongoing work of transforming the health system. To this end, we draw your attention to a number of points we feel are imperative at this early stage in the process.

In order to achieve a health system that provides the care people need no matter who they are or where they live, and also addresses the current inconsistencies across the LHINs that were identified in

the 2015 Annual Report of the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario, it is fundamental that the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, under your leadership, be the steward of the health system as a whole. To this end, we ask that you set common principles and expectations, starting with this consultation phase.

As you state in your proposal “all high-performing health care systems are based on strong primary care services” and “effective primary care is essential to improving health outcomes”. In your speech at *HealthAchieve 2015* you called primary care “the bedrock to the health care system”. We fully agree. The overarching principle in OPCC’s *Framework for Primary Care in Ontario* is:

“to improve population health, deliver people-centered services and strengthen our publicly funded health system, Ontario must create a stronger foundation for the delivery of primary care in this province”.

Fundamental to achieving this overarching principle, we further assert that:

- Primary care is the foundation of a high performing health system;
- Planning for the system needs to be based on equity-informed population needs;
- Programs and services must be appropriate, accessible, timely, high-quality, comprehensive, continuous, evidence-informed, equitable and culturally competent;
- Care coordination is a core function of primary care; and
- Collaborative interprofessional teams working to full scope of practice are key to success.

The OPCC’s core principles for a high performing primary care system outlined above are well aligned with the vision provided in your *Patients First* proposal and we strongly recommend that the OPCC’s *Framework for Primary Care in Ontario* become the foundation for a consistent approach to primary care in the province. We have attached the full document and will be pleased to discuss it with you.

Minister, primary care as the foundation of a high performing health system is fundamental to achieving a health system that truly puts patients, and people, first. Comprehensive primary care is provided across a person’s lifespan – from womb to tomb – and provides care close to home, within people’s communities. Comprehensive primary care is a two way street that aims to ensure people move seamlessly in and out of the different parts of the health care system, and other systems, when and as they need to do so.

We want to partner and collaborate closely with the MOHLTC and the LHINs to deliberately develop a plan to strengthen primary care as the foundation of the system. To begin this journey, we strongly recommend that the MOHLTC direct the LHINs to develop implementation plans aligned with the *Framework for Primary Care in Ontario*.

As first steps we recommend:

1. That MOHLTC sets out clear principles and expectations to guide the planning by LHINs, Cancer Care Ontario and other stakeholders. These guiding principles should be aligned with OPCC’s

*Framework for Primary Care in Ontario*. Specifically, given the priorities established in *Patients First*, the guiding principles should include embedding care coordination, palliative care and mental health care in primary care.

2. That a clear, transparent province wide plan to embed care coordinators in primary care organizations, be developed in consultation with primary care, including the OPCC. In addition, given the critical role of care coordination in Health Links, primary care should be the lead for Health Links. This can also include the opportunity to transfer the leadership of Health Links currently led by CCACs.
3. That the Mental Health and Addictions Leadership Advisory Council specifically address the important intersection between mental health and primary care for children, adolescents and adults and that primary care representation be increased, especially in the system alignment subcommittee.
4. That the comprehensive strategy on palliative and end-of-life care, led by Parliamentary Assistant (PA) John Fraser and supported by Cancer Care Ontario through the provincial palliative care network, emphasize a palliative approach to care that builds a strong and integrated foundation in primary care, enables robust inter-professional care and thrives through proactive evidence-based clinical engagement (see attached OPCC letter January 15, 2016).
5. That the MOHLTC ensure a consistent primary health care population needs-based planning approach across all fourteen LHINs, so that the LHINs possess consistent, high quality, equity informed population needs-based planning data to inform the implementation of their expanded role in primary care. The work of the South East LHIN and the South West LHIN in this area could inform this work.

One of your key promises in *Patients First* is that people across this province can expect equitable services no matter who they are or where they live. This promise is central to our strong request that you, as Minister and steward of the health system, clearly set out the “rules of the game” for primary care evolution across all fourteen LHINs. As leaders of primary care, we commit to working with you to strengthen primary care and implement a coherent plan. We trust the attached *Framework* will provide what is needed to establish those parameters as it relates to primary care.

Finally, OPCC is developing additional advice to submit to you by mid-March. Specifically, we will be focussing our response on:

- Embedding care co-ordination in primary care and the next steps to support implementation. We are attaching the *OPCC position statement: Care Coordination in Primary Care* which will guide this work.
- Access to interprofessional health care providers and access to teams
- The interface between primary care, mental health and addictions
- Governance, clinical leadership and capacity enhancement
- Performance management and accountability

Minister, we are writing this letter with some time sensitivity. We know that over the next few months, the Ministry, LHINs and provincial stakeholders are engaged in consultations working towards the introduction of legislative changes in the spring. It is our hope that this letter will inform the direction and nature of these consultations as it relates to primary care evolution.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to provide this initial response to *Patients First*. You have created a moment in history where, together, we can make changes that will impact generations to come. If we do not start this journey today, with a deliberate plan to make primary care the foundation of the system, we will never achieve the outcomes Ontarians need and deserve.

Given the urgency of the recommendations in this letter and our policy documents, we would be pleased to have an opportunity to meet with you.

In closing, OPCC members look forward to working with you, the Ministry staff, LHINs, our memberships and other stakeholders to achieve the promise in the *Patients First* proposal.

Sincerely,



Jessica Hill  
Co-chair, OPCC  
CEO, OCFP



Adrianna Tetley  
Co-chair, OPCC  
CEO, AOHC

Attachments:

- *Framework for Primary Care in Ontario, 2016*
- *Position Statement on Care Co-ordination in Primary Care, 2015*
- Letter to Cancer Care Ontario

Copies to:

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Susan Pigott, Chair of Mental Health and Addictions Leadership Advisory Council  
OPCC member associations