

Invest in Comprehensive Primary Health Care *a strong foundation for an integrated health system*

The people of Ontario, and Belleville and Quinte West, are facing some significant challenges:

- Over 20 percent of people living in Trenton and Belleville do not have a primary health care provider.
- Access to mental health and addictions services is inadequate.
- Access to community care and home care services is not adequate or dependable.
- The integration between health service providers in community, and between community and acute, is not sufficiently resourced to be adequately dynamic or robust.

While several initiatives are underway to address some of these themes, the initiatives – while appreciated – are insufficient to make an appreciable change in the pressures and further action is required.

For the Ontario Budget 2024, Belleville and Quinte West Community Health Centre's key recommendation are for funding investments to *keep community health strong and keep people in community and out of emergency rooms* through addressing the crisis in Health Human Resources, implementing base budget increases for community health, and laying a foundation for fundamentally orienting the system from health **care** to health **promotion**. These investments will ensure efficient use of healthcare funding for equitable health outcomes for everyone in Ontario.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Invest in health human resources for interprofessional primary health care teams.

Budget Request: \$165M over 5 years

Rationale: Ontario needs to invest approximately \$165 million or a 12.3% increase over 5 years to reach the 2023 recommended salaries for Alliance members, of which BQWCHC is a member to ensure a well-resourced, fully-staffed primary health care system that can support people and communities and ensure the whole health system is not overwhelmed. In November 2023, the Alliance for Healthier Communities (Alliance) of which BQWCHC is a member, along with nine other provincial associations representing primary and community care providers jointly released a new report, [Ontario Community Health Compensation Market Salary Review](#), showing that despite the rising cost of living and a competitive health care job market, community health sector staff experienced an average salary increase of only 1.53% in 2023, with some roles projecting a 0% increase. This pales in comparison to the 11% increase awarded to hospital nurses and the 8% increase for emergency medical services, further exacerbating the wage gap.

Community-governed comprehensive primary health care organizations like BQWCHC need to be properly staffed and resourced to deliver primary health care for those who need it the most. Community-based primary health care organizations need to be able to meet the mounting pressures of the Health Human Resource (HHR) crisis. We call on the Government to invest \$165 million in Health Human Resources for inter-professional primary health care teams.

Healthcare workers and staff across the community-based primary health care sector are facing unprecedented burnout and low morale, particularly after nearly three years providing health care and social services to patients/clients during the pandemic, compounded by a time of social unrest and of economic instability. We have frontline staff who are dependent on the local foodbank to feed their families.

For years, healthcare providers and administrative staff in community based non-profit primary, community, mental health and addiction, and long-term care have faced lower pay grades than other parts of the healthcare sector. The current level of funding is inadequate and does not keep up with inflation or cost of living, which makes recruiting and retaining staff a challenge. We regularly lose staff to hospitals and post-secondary institutions.

2. Invest in community-based primary health care organizations through base funding increases.

Budget Request: \$33.7M

Rationale: Ontario needs to invest in a base budget increase of 5% or \$33.7 million for community-governed comprehensive primary health care organizations so they can maintain and improve service levels, keep their lights on and meet the needs of their clients and the communities they serve who face the greatest barriers to care and poorest health outcomes. As a sector we have not had a base budget increase to meet operational pressures in 15 years; BQWCHC has not had a base budget increase to meet operational pressures since we were established in 2010.

Community health organizations like BQWCHC provide care for populations that are 68% more complex, on average, compared to the average Ontarian. Despite this complexity, clients served go to emergency departments less than expected - resulting in over \$27 million saved every year.

We call on the Government to invest \$33.7 million or 5% base budget funding increases to community-governed comprehensive primary health care organizations so they can maintain and improve service levels, keep their lights on and meet the needs of their clients and the communities they serve.

Community-based comprehensive primary health care organizations like ours continue to divert people away from hospitals while ensuring they get the care they need, when they need it; and help alleviate pressures on the rest of the health system by managing clients in the community and close to home with services rooted in the determinants of health, anti-oppression and cultural safety. We serve people and communities – people who are living on low-incomes, living with mental illness and/or substance use, who are unhoused, who are 2SQLGBT+. These communities are more likely to experience poor – and avoidable – poor health outcomes.

However, as the cost of doing business and providing services in Ontario continues to rise, we have not had a base budget funding increase in over **15 years**. Increasing costs of utilities, insurance, property maintenance, and rent top the list of pressures, closely followed by cyber security, cyber insurance and overhead/staff support for new initiatives. We are now in the unfortunate position of having to consider service cuts in order to pay our bills.

We need sustainable and adequate funding in order to maintain our capacity to deliver primary health care, mental health services, health promotion and community programs and services to keep people healthy and well in their communities and out of hospital.

Primary care clinicians, such as those working in Alliance members' teams, continue to play an integral and multi-faceted role in Ontario's health care system, taking on new roles, innovating and responding to urgent and new needs, while also continuing to provide primary care services like prevention, acute and chronic care — all without additional resources.

- We operate clinics for covid, cough, flu for people who are attached to a primary health care provider.
- We prepare and distribute meals to people living on low-incomes.
- We bring organizations together to leverage ideas and funds from other sources to respond to community issues like opioid drug poisonings.
- We create programs to encourage parents and children to read books as a strategy for health promotion.

Summary

[The research shows that](#) primary health care staff have been underpaid, paid at or under 2017 salary rates and are leaving the sector as the cost of living rises.

[The evidence is clear, investments in comprehensive primary health care keeps people in community and out of hospitals!](#) The Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences (ICES) found that, even though community-based primary health care organizations like ours serve people with more socially and medically complex

needs, we do a significantly better job than other primary care models at keeping these people out of hospital emergency rooms and helping to end hallway medicine.

Increasing funding to address the HHR crisis, a 5% increase base budget funding for community-governed comprehensive primary healthcare organizations for equitable, culturally safe inter-professional team-based care will enable the sector to respond to the barriers to health for priority populations, population health and improve health care for everyone living in Ontario.

Belleville and Quinte West Community Health Centre (BQWCHC) serves the people of the Quinte area in southeastern Ontario. Our mission is to improve the health of people and communities, with a focus on those who face barriers to physical, mental and social wellbeing. We do this by ensuring equitable access to primary health care, building community, empowering people, collaborating, and delivering evidence-informed quality programs and services. We provide a range of services and programming for our own primary health care clients and for the larger community. Services include: primary health care including nutrition, mental health, and dental care; health promotion programming including group education; community resourcing including system navigation; and regional programs such as Telemedicine and Lung Health programs.

BQWCHC has offices in Belleville and Trenton, Ontario.

Belleville and Quinte West Community Health Centre is a member of the Alliance for Healthier Communities, a vibrant network of 111 community-governed primary health care organizations serving communities across Ontario that share a commitment to advancing health equity through the delivery of comprehensive primary health care.

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