



— **OBCM** —
Ontario's Big City Mayors

February 16, 2023

The Hon. Sylvia Jones
Minister of Health
5th Floor - 777 Bay St.
Toronto, ON
M7A 1Z8

Dear Minister Jones,

On behalf of Ontario's Big City Mayors (OBCM) we are writing today to share with you and your colleagues a recent motion passed at our meeting on Friday February 10th, 2023. This motion was to adopt an OBCM *Health and Homelessness Strategy* with five recommendations for the Ontario government to make an immediate impact on the mental health, addictions and homelessness crisis in our communities. It has become clear that the traditional shelter system and methods of getting services to those in crisis are not working. These recommendations propose a transformational system-wide change and were developed using information gathered through consultation with local health partners, to identify services required to ensure there is a health care continuum and appropriate response to this crisis.

OBCM has been dedicated to tackling homelessness, mental health and addictions issues in our communities over the last few years, and we are happy that we can provide the government with these recommendations on how we can work together to find solutions to this growing crisis. These issues cannot be ignored, and municipalities do not have the resources, expertise, or financial capacity to do it on our own. It is critical that the province fund programs that can help to address this crisis within our communities.

We look forward to presenting our *Health and Homelessness Strategy* to you and your colleagues at the upcoming meeting you committed to having with OBCM and other key stakeholders. Our Executive Director Michelle Baker is working with your staff to determine when this meeting can take place and can be reached at michelle@obcm.ca or 647-308-6602.

{see below for a copy of OBCM's *Health and Homelessness Strategy* motion}

Sincerely,

Bonnie Crombie
Mayor, City of Mississauga
Chair, Ontario's Big City Mayors (OBCM)

Mayor Bonnie Crombie, Chair
info@obcm.ca www.obcm.ca



— **OBCM** —
Ontario's Big City Mayors

- c. Hon. Premier Doug Ford
Hon. Minister Steve Clark
Hon. Minister Michael Kerzner
Hon. Minister Merrilee Fullerton
Hon. Minister Victor Fedeli
Hon. Associate Minister Michael Tibollo

MOTION – OBCM RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE HEALTH AND HOMELESSNESS CRISIS
- MOTION PASSED FRIDAY FEBRUARY 10, 2023

WHEREAS municipalities do not have the expertise, capacity, or resources to address increasingly complex health care issues that lead to homelessness or extend chronic homelessness; and are diverting municipal funds for other priorities like affordable housing, transit, social programs etc. to manage these complex health care issues we are seeing in our communities;

AND WHEREAS because traditional housing and shelter spaces are not equipped to serve people with severe mental health and addiction challenges, people often live in the rough in encampments in parks, public spaces or on streets.

AND WHEREAS this is an unprecedented health crisis – leading to unsupervised and dangerous substance use, overdoses, strain on the healthcare system, increased volatility and violence, public safety concerns, business, and downtown degradation;

AND WHEREAS OBCM municipalities have responded to this health care crisis with various housing-driven support programs with limited success and some of our municipalities have taken steps to initiate stronger community partnerships, break down care silos to facilitate better access to support with less barriers;

AND WHEREAS there is no coordinated system response and a lack of the wrap-around health care support services people need – the physical health, mental health, and addiction expertise the province is responsible to provide;

THEREFORE IT BE RESOLVED THAT OBCM adopts the strategy created by the City of London and the City of Kingston in consultation with local health partners to address these challenges including five recommendations for the Ontario government to make an immediate impact on the mental health and addictions crisis we are experiencing. These include:

1. Centralized and integrated intake and dispatch process

- An intentionally designed and consistent triage, warm transfer, and dispatch process operating 24 hours a day, 7 days a week year-round by a multidisciplinary, multi agency team, that is well resourced, low/no barrier, trauma and violence informed, culturally aware and flexible to meet the needs of individuals across a range of circumstances and levels of acuity. Inputs to this process could include Community Outreach and Support Teams (COAST), local service providers, and businesses.



— **OBCM** —
Ontario's Big City Mayors

2. More provincial investment in low barrier hubs

- Residents need more options for 24/7 low barrier drop-in services with basic rules and a pathway into stabilization options with experienced staff with mental health and addictions expertise. The Hub model provides 24/7 low barrier and wrap around services to people with high acuity that have not been accessing the traditional shelter services. The ICH (integrated care hub) can be combined with a Consumption Treatment Services site.

3. More stabilization and treatment beds with experienced staff to support those in their treatment journey

- Communities need a greater variety of options to support high acuity clients on their stabilization pathway. This includes provincial treatment and rehabilitation facilities and additional stabilization, rehab and detox beds.

4. More flexible and predictable funding for supportive housing

- There needs to be a range of supportive housing and options which could include small scale options (i.e., scattered housing), harm reduction housing solutions where municipalities can financially support with the property acquisition/development, but provincial funding is needed to finance ongoing support services as tenants are not capable of living fully independently. This service can prevent evictions and homelessness.

5. More provincial ministry and agency collaboration to reduce red tape and duplication

- Municipalities are increasingly forced to wade into provincial jurisdictions, navigating a siloed system, trying to break down health care silos to best support unhoused individuals suffering with mental health and addictions challenges. However, we need better provincial ministry collaboration to reduce red tape, duplication and financial resources and better coordinate wrap-around support for residents in need.

AND THAT Ontario's Big City Mayors will present this five point plan to the Deputy Premier and Minister of Health Sylvia Jones at the meeting/summit that we have requested to address the homelessness, mental health, safety and addictions crisis impacting our cities.