



# Ontario

# Health Teams

## 2022 ROMA Delegation

## Briefing Note

### **Introduction**

The EOWC has identified Ontario Health Teams (OHTs) as a key priority. For more than 150 years, Ontario municipalities have provided their communities with health and community services. EOWC members are critical partners in the delivery of health care and are responsible for co-funding and delivering a number of health-related services that fall under the OHT umbrella, including paramedic services, long-term care, public health, as well as a range of social service supports in the community that are the social determinants of health.

In order to address local needs, EOWC member municipalities also make additional financial contributions above and beyond their required cost-share to hospitals, family health teams/medical centres, and physician recruitment. Since 2017, EOWC member municipalities have invested ~ \$613M in locally raised tax dollars for health services which equates to approximately \$122.6M per year.

EOWC members have a vested interest in the health care system and strive to shape the best possible care for rural eastern Ontario residents. The EOWC endeavors to ensure that rural residents have access to the same quality care as their urban counterparts.

### **Ontario Health Teams**

Across eastern Ontario, OHTs are in various stages of development. Some EOWC members are a partner in an approved OHT; some are involved in the application phase, while others are excluded from the entire process. The EOWC believe that OHTs are a good concept, and there is no objection to integrated health care with a resident first focus; however, there is an inconsistency in municipalities' engagement with their local OHT and that is of significant concern to our members.

In addition, the funding and the governance models of OHTs require accountable and responsible representation. Specifically, municipalities require a meaningful seat at the senior governance table, given the array of health-related services they provide and the thousands of municipal employees providing these services directly to the public.

The EOWC advocates on behalf of their member municipalities that there must be a meaningful role for municipalities to play in OHT governance, regardless of previous or existing financial relationships with hospitals. The Province should also create a consistent governance model that provides a mechanism to discuss and dispute funding decisions, as required.

The EOWC strongly advocates for the Province to mandate that the leadership of all OHTs must include representation from **each** County or Region within their catchment area. Elected members of municipal councils have a duty to represent the interests of their ratepayers, by providing oversight for health-related services and are best positioned to make local health-care decisions as they understand the unique challenges that our communities face. They are elected to represent the interests of their taxpayers and communities and, as such, must be at the governance table to participate in these local health and community decisions.

A guiding principle of the EOWC is ‘say for pay’, where municipalities are required to pay for services, a governance model needs to be in place that allows municipalities to have a say in program development and delivery. OHTs needs to function in a similar manner to the Board of Health where each County and City have a vote. The responsibility to be the voice of our residents in the future direction of community-based health care, including the evolution of OHTs, is a key priority for the EOWC.

It is also critical that both current and future municipal investments in local health care are protected. The OHT model must be designed to protect municipal operating and capital investments into programs they operate such as long-term care, paramedic services and community services.

Municipalities are the only health care agency that is both a taxing and spending authority and OHT funding and programs should respect this unique delivery model. OHT processes will impact funding from upper and single-tier municipalities for direct health care services and social services, as well as influence the way these services are delivered to our residents. Additionally, elected members of municipal councils have a duty to represent the interests of their ratepayers, by providing oversight for health-related services. While direct taxation may not be an issue for an agency with a volunteer Board of Directors, it is of paramount importance to our municipal councils. This process should be transparent and based on a governance model that will allow municipalities to meet their fiduciary duty and responsibilities under the Municipal Act. In short, the EOWC must be confident in a decision-making framework that recognizes the unique role of municipalities.

## **Conclusion**

Municipal governments are innovative and collaborative. Rural communities have always been innovative in deploying health care services, never more so than during the pandemic. Municipally delivered services such as paramedic services and long-term care have been integral to the collaboration and coordination of the COVID response.

The EOWC remains committed to being the Province's municipal voice and local expert. As co-funders and service delivery agents, EOWC members are strategically positioned at the front line to provide meaningful input into health care planning and local operations.