

January 28, 2025

Hon. Sylvia Jones  
Deputy Premier & Minister of Health  
Legislative Building  
Queen's Park  
Toronto ON M7A 1A1

Hon. Michael Tibollo  
Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions  
Legislative Building  
Queen's Park  
Toronto, ON M7A 1A1

**RE: Addressing Ontario's Mental Health and Substance Use Crisis**

Dear Ministers,

Ontario communities are facing a crisis. As of 2023, an average of seven people die every day from opioid-related overdoses. A further one in five live with mental illness. We clearly see this with the growing number of people living under precarious housing conditions across the province. Recently, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario released a study indicating that an estimated 81,515 Ontarians experienced homelessness in 2024.

Our communities lack a sustainable flow of financial resources to address the interrelated mental health, addictions, and homelessness crises. As such, we are calling for a shift in our collective approach to support and treat those living with addiction and mental health issues.

Chambers of Commerce and Boards of Trade recognize that social issues are business issues. We recognize the government's efforts in the [Roadmap to Wellness: A Plan to Build Ontario's Mental Health and Addictions System and Your Health: A Plan for Connected and Convenient Care](#), and recent actions including new regulations on supervised consumption sites; the commitment to implement a HART hubs model; and recent decisions to address safety concerns due to encampments.

Notwithstanding this progress, there remain gaps that impede solutions to this crisis. Ontario needs a comprehensive all-of-government approach that includes the perspectives of the community, subject matter experts, medical professionals, and businesses.

Our businesses are on the front lines of this crisis. They report a huge increase in loss prevention challenges, vandalism, and hostile behaviour toward staff and customers. These issues create negative

perceptions of our downtown cores and main streets, further challenging businesses' ability to attract customers and retain staff. This is all happening as we continue to see dampened revenue due to reduced foot traffic since the pandemic.

Business owners' strength and resolve are being tested. Many tell us they are considering closing their businesses or moving their operations outside the hearts of our cities. A lack of government action would harm our communities, and our ability to retain up-and-coming innovators and entrepreneurs.

Our recommendations to the Government of Ontario include the following:

- **Create a Unified, Consolidated Province-Wide Database on Homelessness, Mental Health, and Addictions.** To better address these intersecting challenges, a unified, consolidated province-wide database that tracks individuals experiencing these challenges and the accessibility of treatment options, such as HART Hubs, must be created. Such a database would enhance coordination among service providers, support evidence-based policy decisions, and improve outcomes for vulnerable populations. Other databases, such as the federal Homeless Individuals and Families Information System and the Ontario Mental Health Reporting System, maintained by the Canadian Institute for Health Information, are potential blueprints.
- **Quantify the Costs of Homelessness, Addictions, and Mental Health Issues.** To better understand the financial impact of the crisis, the government should complete a comprehensive assessment of the costs associated with these challenges, focusing on both public and private sector costs. This would include expenditures on hospital visits, paramedic services, social service outreach, and police interactions. Consultations with the private sector will quantify the financial toll, including costs from interactions with individuals experiencing these challenges and their effects on staff and customers.
- **Enhance Early-Stage Healthcare Supports for Addiction, Mental Health, and Homelessness.** To reduce long-term social and economic costs, the government must accelerate the expansion of healthcare at earlier stages in Ontarians' journeys with addiction, mental health challenges, and homelessness. This can build on initiatives such as the *Roadmap to Wellness*. These frameworks emphasize improving access to integrated care and streamlining support systems. Targeted action should focus on prevention and early intervention, to prevent crises before they occur.
- **Expand Addictions and Mental Health Treatment Capacity.** Timely and effective care is critical when it's needed most. Building on recent investments in mental health and addiction services like the addition of 27 new HART hubs, the government should significantly increase treatment spaces to ensure prompt access for people in need in all communities across Ontario. By scaling capacity to meet rising demand, Ontario can reduce wait times, prevent further escalation of crises, and build a more responsive and equitable system of care.

Further recommendations are highlighted in detail in the Ontario Chamber of Commerce's reports and policy primers. These include [Mind the Gap Addressing the Mental Health and Addictions "Echo Pandemic" in Ontario](#), and [Beyond Emergency Declarations: Charting Ontario's Course Through the Substance Use and Overdose Crisis](#).

Ontario's economy, and our communities, depend on tackling the mental health crisis through renewed attention and sustainable investment in our municipalities.

Ontario's business community stands ready to support the government's efforts to address these issues head-on. By working together, we can build a healthier, more resilient workforce and spur economic growth and prosperity. The time to address these challenges is now.

Sincerely,



Daniel Tisch, APR, FCPRS, ICD.D

*President and CEO*

*Ontario Chamber of Commerce*

INSERT CHAMBER NAME

CC:

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy, Minister of Finance, Government of Ontario  
Alyssa Best, Director of Policy – Health, Office of the Premier of Ontario