



DELIVERED VIA EMAIL

The Honourable Andrea Khanjin
Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks
Province of Ontario
minister.mecp@ontario.ca

Dear Minister Khanjin,

Re: Support for Maintaining the Existing Provincial Wastewater Surveillance System

On behalf of the Board of Health for Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Health Unit, I am writing regarding the recent announcement that the Government of Ontario will end support for provincial wastewater surveillance. Ontario has built an exemplary surveillance system which currently covers more than 60% of the population. Within North America, other jurisdictions are still trying to build the system which exists in this province. Ending this program will significantly reduce the ability of public health units to accurately predict and understand disease conditions within their region that impact health. I strongly urge the Ministry to continue the funding required to sustain wastewater sampling and surveillance.

Since the program began during the pandemic, local wastewater sampling has become an essential tool for understanding risk. It is a frequent source of population data for Public Health, local elected leaders, researchers, the press and the public at large. This information provides confidence and local context which the residents of the region use to guide decisions that keep their families safe and healthy.


The wastewater surveillance program has helped to foster a coordinated network across Ontario with standardized procedures, daily sampling and robust population coverage. While it has limitations, the resulting information has been widely acknowledged as valuable data on local respiratory illnesses and their place within a broader provincial context. This is especially true in its ability to function as an “early warning system” or leading indicator of respiratory illness. Currently there is no better surveillance tool to give public health a local picture of these illnesses and its loss will have a profound impact on our understanding of the health trends within our region.

An important lesson of the COVID-19 pandemic is the need to explore innovative approaches that deliver exceptional public health resources grounded in value for service to residents. The wastewater surveillance program is just such an innovative approach. Rather than shuttering it, we ask that you reconsider its continued role in monitoring respiratory illness, as well as its potential to understand other emerging diseases. Data from the wastewater surveillance program arms us with vital information to make wise and robust public health decisions.

Like you, I recognize the many financial pressures that come with delivering services to Ontarians. There are few easy answers as we all seek to provide good value for money. However, the benefits associated with the wastewater surveillance program and its place in emergency preparedness exceed the cost. We look forward to working with your team, the Ministry of Health and other key partners to explore how we can continue this vital work.

Thank you for your leadership on behalf of the residents of Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph.

Respectfully,



George Bridge
Chair, Board of Health for Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Health Unit

cc: The Honourable Sylvia Jones, Minister of Health – via email
Dr. Keiran Moore, Chief Medical Officer of Health – via email
Ted Arnott, MPP – Wellington-Halton Hills – via email
Mike Shreiner, MPP – Guelph – via email
Guy Gardhouse, Mayor, Dufferin County – via email
Chris White, Mayor, Township of Guelph-Eramosa – via email
Cam Guthrie, Mayor, Guelph – via email
Darren White, Warden, Dufferin County – via email
Andy Lennox, Warden, Wellington County – via email
Peter Sovran, Director of Education, UGDSB – via email
All Ontario Health Units – via email