

HALTON WEIGHS IN ON PUBLIC HEALTH OVERHAUL

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As the Province gears up to revamp Ontario's public-health system, the Region is urging the Ford government to leave Halton's health department alone.

Halton staff and council members recently delivered this message to provincial officials who are conducting consultations on the topic, with a discussion paper on public-health modernization serving as the basis for the sessions.

Since the proposal to replace Ontario's 35 health units with 10 regional public-health entities first came up last year, Halton had advocated that it should continue to provide local health services, and that council should remain

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as the board of health to maintain accountability and streamline administration.

"Changes to the existing organizational structure and governance model in Halton would cause disruptions to service delivery, and could be complicated and costly," said Medical Officer of Health Dr. Hamidah Meghani as she reiterated Halton's submissions to the Province during council's Jan. 15 meet-

ing.

The discussion paper seeks input on four key challenges when it comes to public health: insufficient capacity, duplication of effort, inconsistent priority setting, and misalignment of health, social and other services.

On the priority setting front, Halton Hills Councillor Jane Fogal contended there should be inconsistencies across the province.



Halton Region screenshot
Halton Medical Officer of Health Dr. Hamidah Meghani

"If we don't have a cookie-cutter approach, it does seem that priorities would be different in different jurisdictions, like in northern Ontario," she said. "We should be tailoring our priorities to our locale, not trying to be homogenous."

Fogal, who was among the local politicians taking part in the consultation with the Province, said she hopes the Ontario government is listening to the feedback it's receiving.

"If they want to improve the system, they were given hints about how to do that, and meddling with us was not one of them," she said. "They say they have these goals, and as if changing everything will make it true, but I don't think it will."

When it comes to the alignment of health, social and other services, Meghani pointed to the partnerships the health unit has already established with local hospitals, school boards and more.

"Given the strong relationships in the community, along with the size of the population, Halton feels it's important to maintain the boundaries of the public health unit so as not to disrupt these key relationships," she explained.

To reduce duplication of efforts, Meghani suggested the Province could create

things like Ontario-wide electronic medical records and an immunization registry.

Halton officials used the consultation opportunity to remind the Province that its public health funding has not kept pace with the rate of growth, with the Region routinely contributing funds from its coffers to maintain local services.

The Province has also released a discussion paper on the modernization of emergency health services. Halton director of paramedic services Greg Sage attended the consultations to push for the modernization of the local EMS dispatch system, among other things.

Regional Chair Gary Carr will now write to Premier Doug Ford, health minister Christine Elliott and her advisor, Jim Pine, reiterating Halton's position.

The Province will continue gathering feedback on the topic until Feb. 10.



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