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Archived - September 2016 Mandate letter: Seniors' Secretariat

Premier's instructions to the Minister on priorities.



September 23, 2016

The Honourable Dipika Damerla
Minister Responsible for Seniors Affairs
Ontario Seniors Secretariat
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Toronto, Ontario
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Dear Minister Damerla:

Welcome to your role as Minister Responsible for Seniors Affairs. As we mark the mid-point of our mandate, we have a strong and new Cabinet, and are poised to redouble our efforts to deliver on our top priority — creating jobs and growth. Guided by our balanced plan to build Ontario up for everyone, we will continue to work together to deliver real benefits and more inclusive growth that will help people in their everyday lives.

We embark on this important part of our mandate knowing that our four-part economic plan is working — we are making the largest investment in public infrastructure in Ontario's history, making postsecondary education more affordable and accessible, leading the transition to a low-carbon economy and the fight against climate change, and building retirement security for workers.

Building on our ambitious and activist agenda, and with a focus on implementing our economic plan, we will continue to forge partnerships with businesses, educators, labour, communities, the not-for-profit sector and with all Ontarians to foster economic growth and to make a genuine, positive difference in people's lives. Collaboration and active listening remain at the heart of the work we undertake on behalf of the people of Ontario — these are values that ensure a common purpose, stimulate positive change and help achieve desired outcomes. With this in mind, I ask that you work closely with your Cabinet colleagues to deliver positive results on initiatives that cut across several ministries, such as our Climate Change Action Plan, Business Growth Initiative, and the Highly Skilled Workforce Strategy. I also ask you to collaborate with the Minister Responsible for Digital Government to drive digital transformation across government and modernize public service delivery.

We have made tangible progress and we have achieved the following key results:

- Introduced the proposed *Seniors Active Living Centres Act* (currently the *Elderly Persons Centres Act*) that, if passed, would enable opportunities for future investment and encourage community partnerships while adding funding flexibility for program providers. Elderly Persons Centres offer a range of social, cultural, learning and recreational programs for seniors.
- Launched the Age-Friendly Community Planning Grant Program, which is providing \$1.5 million in funding over two years for 56 projects to help local governments and organizations plan for more accessible and inclusive communities.
- Conducted the five-year review of the *Retirement Homes Act, 2010* and tabled a summary of findings in the legislature. The purpose of the review was to identify opportunities to further strengthen the legislation which provides protection to 55,000 seniors living in over 700 licensed retirement homes.
- Invested \$5 million to support up to 923 projects impacting approximately 256,000 seniors across the province through the Seniors Community Grant Program since 2014 to keep them active and engaged.
- Approximately 900,000 patients and visitors — including 135,000 seniors — are expected to benefit each year from reduced hospital parking prices that resulted from working with patients, patient advocacy groups and hospitals to develop a provincial approach to make hospital parking more affordable.
- Supported the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care to raise the low-income threshold for seniors accessing the Seniors Co-Payment Program — more seniors will have greater access to lower cost medications through the Ontario Drug Benefit Program.
- Expanded access to the shingles vaccine — eligible seniors between the ages of 65 and 70, will receive the vaccine free of charge.

Your mandate is to help improve the quality of life of Ontario seniors and support public education efforts for and about older Ontarians. Your specific priorities include:

Promoting Healthy, Active and Engaged Seniors

- Continuing to provide leadership for initiatives related to:
 - Age-friendly communities that promote policies, programs, services and environments to support and enable people to age actively. People in age-friendly communities are supported in maintaining their independence and having access to the community supports and services they require.
 - Wandering prevention for persons with Alzheimer's disease and related dementias.

Engaging Seniors in Their Local Communities

- Developing an enhanced governance and accountability framework for Elderly Persons Centres (i.e., proposed Seniors Active Living Centres) that drives best practice, encourages engagement and participation, and can inform any future expansion of the number of centres and program offerings.
- Continuing to work with:
 - Inter-ministerial colleagues to explore the development of communication tools and forums to assist older Ontarians, their families and caregivers to increase awareness and accessibility of programs and services available within their communities.

- The Minister of Housing to ensure seniors' perspectives on housing issues are reflected in on-going policy and planning.
- Recognizing Ontario's rich cultural diversity, work with partners to facilitate and engage in a dialogue with multicultural communities to gain a better understanding of their perspectives regarding retirement.

Strengthening Efforts to Address the Abuse and Neglect of Older Adults

- Leading initiatives to raise public awareness of elder abuse and neglect among older adults, friends and family to help them recognize abuse, provide support, and seek assistance.
- Working with the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, Attorney General, Minister of Community and Social Services, Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services, and the Minister Responsible for Women's Issues to support:
 - Training opportunities for sectors serving older adults to increase their ability to identify and respond to the signs of elder abuse.
 - Initiatives that will help co-ordinate community responses across sectors to better assist victims of elder abuse in communities across the province.

In addition to the priority activities above, I ask that you also deliver results for Ontarians by driving progress in the following areas:

- Work with the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services, Minister of Finance, Minister of Municipal Affairs, and Minister of Infrastructure to provide funding for small or rural retirement homes that would not otherwise be able to afford to install automated sprinklers systems in their homes by January 1, 2019.
- Continue to invest in programming to help seniors stay engaged and connected to their communities including expanding the Seniors Community Grant Program and the Age-Friendly Community Planning Grant Program along with continued oversight of and support for Ontario's Elderly Persons Centres network.
- Continue to support implementation of the government's community hubs strategy.
- Continue implementation and oversight of the *Retirement Homes Act*.
- Listen to the voices of seniors and take their views into consideration when shaping policies and programs.
- Work with other ministers to bring seniors' perspectives forward as they develop policies and programs that impact seniors.
- Working with the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care and the Parliamentary Assistant to support:
 - Delivery of a provincial dementia strategy that reflects the needs of Ontario's seniors and their caregivers.
 - Development of an Ontario Caregiver Strategy, to ensure Ontarians supporting their loved ones are equally supported to have health, quality of life and dignity.
 - Ongoing capacity planning for the health sector to ensure the future needs of Ontario's aging population are accounted for.

As you know, taking action on the recommendations contained in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report is a priority for our government. That is why we released *The Journey Together*, a document that serves as a blueprint for making our government's commitment to reconciliation with Indigenous peoples a reality. As we move forward with the implementation of the report, I ask you and your fellow Cabinet members to work together, in co-operation with our Indigenous partners, to help achieve real and measurable change for Indigenous communities.

Having made significant progress over the past year in implementing our community hubs strategy, I encourage you and your Cabinet colleagues to ensure that the Premier's Special Advisor on Community Hubs and the Community Hubs Secretariat, at the Ministry of Infrastructure, are given the support they need to continue their

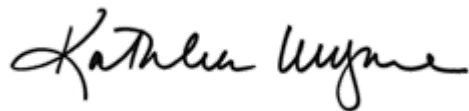
vital cross-government work aimed at making better use of public properties, encouraging multi-use spaces and helping communities create financially sustainable hub models.

Responsible fiscal management remains an overarching priority for our government — a priority echoed strongly in our 2016 Budget. Thanks to our disciplined approach to the province's finances over the past two years, we are on track to balance the budget next year, in 2017–18, which will also lower the province's debt-to-GDP ratio. Yet this is not the moment to rest on our past accomplishments: it is essential that we work collaboratively across every sector of government to support evidence-based decision-making to ensure programs and services are effective, efficient and sustainable, in order to balance the budget by 2017–18, maintain balance in 2018–19, and position the province for longer-term fiscal sustainability.

Marathon runners will tell you that an event's halfway mark is an opportunity to reflect on progress made — but they will also tell you that it is the ideal moment to concentrate more intently and to move decisively forward. At this halfway mark of this government's mandate, I encourage you to build on the momentum that we have successfully achieved over the past two years, to work in tandem with your fellow ministers to advance our economic plan and to ensure that Ontario remains a great place to live, work and raise a family.

I look forward to working together with you to build opportunity and prosperity for all Ontarians.

Sincerely,



Kathleen Wynne
Premier

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