



Jennifer French

MPP, OSHAWA

April 6th, 2022

Hon. Christine Elliott, Minister of Health
Ministry of Health
5th Floor, 777 Bay St.
Toronto, ON M7A 2J3

Matthew Anderson, President and CEO
Ontario Health
500-505 University Ave
Toronto, ON M5G 2L3

Dear Minister Elliott and Mr. Anderson,

I have every faith that you are both aware of the acute and pressing needs across communities when it comes to caring for marginalized populations. While Oshawa is not unique in its desperate need for mental health and addiction resources and support, we have been unique – and a leader – in coordinated, immediate and effective care and intervention through Mission United. The Back Door Mission and its community partners established a model of care that should stand as a gold standard for others to follow when supporting the immediate crisis needs of those most in need. Instead, the funding from the Province – through Ontario Health East – has evaporated without warning. I am appealing to you to quickly respond to this unfortunate situation and ensure that the vital, life-saving medical services can continue at the Back Door Mission.

My office works with unsheltered and underserved constituents. I recognize just how impossible it is for many people living in our community to navigate health care and support systems while struggling with addictions and/or mental health issues. For some people it is nearly impossible to survive. The Back Door Mission is a centre of care and service without equal in the Province. I would invite you to tour and see first-hand the value of a multi-agency approach to care.

Anecdotally, I know that community members are having better experiences with health care, safer journeys through addiction and a higher chance of surviving because of the care and relationships they rely on at the Back Door Mission. I am sure that emergency and on-the-spot medical service and treatment at the Back Door Mission has redirected countless visits away from the emergency room at Lakeridge Health.

Especially during a pandemic where hospital capacity and resources are strained, appropriately redirecting individuals in crisis is the best option. However, days ago the medical support team found out that the funding would not continue beyond March 31. Our community and vulnerable neighbours desperately need this funding to continue. It is not hyperbole to say that lives are at stake.

Services have been so well-coordinated across service partners that the ripple effects of allowing the acute care clinic to end, would mean other programs will not be as successful as they have been.

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COVID-positive Back Door Mission clients have been isolating for community safety through a separate program that the Back Door Mission coordinates. However, for many isolating, their medical and addiction support comes from funding that suddenly no longer exists. What will happen to them?

The harm to vulnerable individuals and the needless additional strain on hospital resources can be avoided by reinvesting in this program that has risen to phenomenal challenge over few years. The Ministry of Health and Ontario Health must protect and encourage successful health initiatives such as Mission United. Please understand that many of the vulnerable clients served at the Back Door Mission cannot access appropriate care elsewhere. It is my understanding that more than 50% of clients struggling with mental health or addictions at the Back Door Mission do not have health cards. They will not be served at private clinics. The clients whose lives are shaped by addictions, mental health crisis, volatility and unpredictability are not going to be successful in scheduling and attending appointments. How in good conscious can we condemn them to struggle alone without care?

The doctors, nurse practitioners, nurses and eight partner service providers are distraught over the uncertain future of the people they care for and serve. For two years, this model has proven itself. For more than six months, Mission United partners have been jumping through hoops to achieve a sustainable funding commitment from Ontario Health. Somewhere there is an application and proposal waiting for approval.

I am imploring you to connect with the leadership and the medical team at the Back Door Mission to understand the ramifications of allowing this medical program to end. Conversely, I hope you will come to appreciate that this success story could be a tremendous and replicable investment. Please decide to provide sustainable funding for this invaluable primary care clinic. I look forward to your urgent attention to this situation in Oshawa.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jennifer French".

Jennifer French
MPP Oshawa

cc

Minister Michael Tibollo, Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions
Anna Greenberg, Chief Regional Officer Toronto and East, Ontario Health
Nathan Gardner, Executive Director Back Door Mission for the Relief of Poverty
Cynthia Davis, President and CEO of Lakeridge Health
John Henry, Regional Chair of Durham Region
Dan Carter, Mayor of Oshawa
Dr. Catherine Meunier, Addiction Medicine Designate
MPP France Gélinas, Official Opposition Critic for Health

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