April 21, 2009

Mayor Fred Eisenberger
Office of the Mayor
Hamilton City Centre
77 James Street North, Suite 230
Hamilton ON L8R 2K3

Dear Mayor Eisenberger:

The Hamilton Niagara Haldimand Brant (HNHB) Local Health Integration Network (LHIN) received a copy of the letter sent on your behalf to Premier McGuinty on Friday, April 10, 2009. We are pleased to see that the City of Hamilton supports the Aging at Home (AHome) and we note that the City is requesting that additional resources be allocated to support “aging in place”. Subsequently, the LHIN requested and reviewed a copy of a draft report that went to your Council.

I want to take the opportunity to update you on the status of the AHome strategy in the HNHB LHIN.

Priorities for Investment:

Approximately $7.6M was allocated to 40 initiatives in Year 1 (2008-09). The priority in the first year was to “close the gap” on longstanding and well documented unmet needs for care and support that assist people to maintain their independence and wellness at home. Community support programs and services were enhanced and expanded in the areas of for instance, day programs, transportation, respite, activities of daily living, peer support and post hospital care in the community.

The priorities for investments in Year 2 (2009-10) were Falls Prevention, and Specialized Services for Frail Elderly. The initiatives recently approved for finalization will be announced within a month; allocations will total approximately $19M.

Year 3 (2010-11) AHome allocations are pending. The LHIN will allocate approximately $35M in November. Overall, the priority focus remains right care, right place to ensure that unnecessary emergency department (ED) visits are avoided, that presentations to the ED can be diverted to community and that people in hospital can return to community with the right supports as soon as possible.
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Outcome measurement is a key feature of all investment and re-allocation strategies. We anticipate no additional government resources, and certainly no additional dollars until all stakeholders have a shared understanding as to the benefits of the investments for our residents.

A central theme in our conversations with funders and decision makers about aging at home is shared responsibility for healthy citizens and healthy communities, including the role of municipal governments. As your letter points out to Premier McGuinty, the role of home care services is important. At the same time, other determinants contribute to independent living:

- transportation is one of three top concerns of all persons getting older in our LHIN communities whether a person lives a block from the bus stop or in a rural community;
- lack of housing options and affordable housing are major impediments to independent living;
- the way communities are built often precludes amenities close to home – the park, the corner store, a year round gathering place – and can increase social isolation;
- the confidence people have in the safety of their streets – people safe, lit pathways, shoveled sidewalks – is an important contributor to independent living; and finally,
- access to primary health and care is key.

The health care envelope on its own is not and will not be sufficient to ensure people who are aging have choices with respect to where and how they live, access to a range of supports and services including housing, transportation, opportunities for socialization and recreation and safe communities. Elder friendly communities for healthy aging and "aging in place" are a shared responsibility.

As Chair of the LHIN, I have committed the LHIN to a series of conversations with decision makers.

- I meet regularly with the Mayors of all our communities and our conversations focus on all of our key directions, pressure points and opportunities for improvement and alignment where feasible.

- I meet regularly as well with MPPs to keep us mutually informed of local health and related issues and future directions.
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- As our Board and Staff review Aging at Home proposals (and others) from the City of Hamilton for example, we are very mindful of Hamilton’s directions and expect that Hamilton proposals are consistent with City wide frameworks and plans.

- Marion Emo, our Senior Director, Planning, Integration and Community Engagement participates on Hamilton’s Government Engagement Working Group, co-chaired by Jo-Anne Priel and designed to foster collaboration, and is in regular communication with your Housing Division to align supportive housing opportunities.

I would like to meet with you and discuss Hamilton’s and the LHIN’s mutual interests and how we can support our shared commitments to healthy aging. I understand too, that the City of Hamilton has a designated LHIN liaison person. Our Staff are looking forward to meeting the individual and determining how best to stay in touch.

Sincerely,

Juanita G. Gledhill
Board Chair