

2022 Pre-Budget Submission to the Government of Ontario Executive Summary

Ontario's Community Epilepsy Agencies are a key part of the healthcare continuum for the 100,000 people living with epilepsy in this province. Community Epilepsy Agencies begin where the doctor's office or hospital ends, with tailored patient education and mental health programs that focus on self-management and community-based care. These programs have a real impact on the quality of life and mental health of people living with epilepsy, and on Ontario's healthcare system as whole.

Epilepsy patient education programs have a direct effect on hospital capacity, reducing unnecessary Emergency Department visits and inpatient admissions. Given the 20,000 annual Emergency Department visits connected to epileptic seizures, maintaining and expanding the ability of Community Epilepsy Agencies to deliver these programs is an important investment towards reducing pressure on Ontario's hospitals as they grapple with the long-term procedure backlog brought on by COVID-19. Improving mental health through tailored epilepsy-specific programs similarly helps reduce usage at other points in the healthcare system.

However, the ability of Community Epilepsy Agencies to deliver these programs is precarious. Many parts of the province do not have a local agency directly serving them and many agencies have been unable to re-establish large fundraising events and activities, central to their budgets, that were impacted by COVID-19. Some agencies have had to lay-off staff just as many are reporting an increase in demand for services. Without provincial funding for their core programs, these services may be lost, with the effect felt at hospitals and physicians' offices.

Multiple governments, going back years, have said 'NO' to requests to fund community-based epilepsy programs. The provincial government has understandably needed to focus its recent attention on the initial challenges associated with COVID-19, but as it continues to address the pandemic's longer-term impacts on our healthcare system our proposal could not be more relevant. Now is the time to say 'YES' to the 100,000 people living with epilepsy in this province by funding community-based programs that benefit them and their families.

The Ministry of Health must invest in education and support programs at Ontario's Community Epilepsy Agencies to both sustain and grow their capacity and reduce unnecessary healthcare system usage;

- Investing \$2.8 million per year, for four years, will save the province \$21 million for a net savings of \$9.7 million over that period;**
- Savings will primarily be found through reduced hospital usage, reducing the number of visits by 16,000 over 4 years and shortening inpatient admissions;**
- Funding can be deployed quickly through Ontario's Community Epilepsy Agencies and remotely delivered to areas without a local agency currently serving them, rapidly stabilizing and increasing the province's community-based epilepsy program capacity and quickly reducing pressure on hospitals.**

With this small but significant investment, the provincial government can take immediate action to improve hospital capacity by reducing unnecessary usage, create healthcare savings, and maintain and improve access to community-based services for thousands of people with epilepsy.