



**Northwestern
Health Unit**

www.nwhu.on.ca

210 First Street North
Kenora, ON P9N 2K4

October 25, 2024

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

Honourable Minister Sylvia Jones
Minister of Health
Ministry of Health
5th Floor, 777 Bay Street
Toronto, ON M5G 2C8

Michael Sherar
President and Chief Executive Officer
Public Health Ontario
661 University Avenue, Suite 1701
Toronto, ON M5G 1M1

Dear Minister Jones and Mr. Sherar:

Re: Support for Ontario to continue to protect the safety of private drinking water

At its meeting on October 25, 2024, the Board of Health for the Northwestern Health Unit passed the following resolution:

WHEREAS many residents in Northwestern Health Unit's service area rely on private drinking water systems such as wells; and

WHEREAS it is recommended that drinking water be tested frequently to ensure it is safe for human consumption; and

WHEREAS exposure to contaminated drinking water can lead to severe gastrointestinal illness, which in rare cases may resolute in death; and

WHEREAS anyone can become ill from drinking contaminated water; however children, older adults, and people with weakened immune systems are at a higher risk of the harmful effects; and

WHEREAS the Public Health Ontario (PHO) Well Water Testing program is a publicly funded service that tests water samples from private drinking water sources for indicators of bacterial contamination; and

WHEREAS testing drinking water quality at private laboratories can be cost prohibitive; and



WHEREAS the Auditor General in its December 6, 2023 Value for Money Audit: Public Health Ontario called for Public Health Ontario and the Ministry of Health to move forward with streamlining laboratory operations in consideration of the proposed modernization plans; and

WHEREAS Public Health Ontario and the Ministry of Health have not yet announced a final plan for streamlining laboratory operations at this time;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Board of Health for the Northwestern Health Unit strongly recommends to the Minister of Health and to Public Health Ontario that Ontario's Well Water Testing program fully continue as part of the plan to implement streamlined laboratory operations; and

FURTHER, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Board of Health endorse the resolutions adopted by the Council of the Town of Gore Bay (May 14, 2024), the Council of Central Manitoulin (July 8, 2024), the Board of Health for Public Health Sudbury and Districts (September 19, 2024); and the letter of the Council of Pickle Lake (September 24, 2024);

Exposure to contaminated drinking water can cause debilitating gastrointestinal illness, particularly in children, older adults and people with weakened immune systems. Given our region's geography, and the barriers to extending underground infrastructure to more homes and businesses, such as bedrock, high costs and capacity challenges, free private well water testing remains important for the health of a significant portion of the population in Northwestern Health Unit's catchment area. For these residents, drinking water testing is the only way to know if their drinking water is safe.

For the well-being of residents, our Board of Health support the continuation of Ontario's publicly funded Well Water Testing program and affirm resolutions adopted by Public Health Sudbury and Districts, the Council of the Town of Gore Bay, the Council of the Corporation of Northeastern Manitoulin & the Islands, and the Council of Central Manitoulin concerning provincial well water testing.

Maintaining publicly-funded drinking water testing is a needed service that protects many Ontarians utilizing private drinking water systems. Thank you for your attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,



Douglas Lawrance

Chair, Board of Health for the Northwestern Health Unit

CC: Hon. Sylvia Jones, Minister of Health and Deputy Premier
Michael Sherar, President and CEO, Public Health Ontario
Public Health Ontario Board of Directors
Dr. Kieran Moore, Chief Medical Officer of Health
Local Municipalities
Ontario Boards of Health
Hon. Greg Rickford, MPP Kenora – Rainy River
Hon. Kevin Holland, MPP Thunder Bay – Atikokan
Sol Mamakwa, MPP Kiiwetinoong
Association of Local Public Health Agencies
Association of Municipalities of Ontario