

**MEDIA STATEMENT: RESPONSE TO THE 2021/22 ONTARIO BUDGET ANNOUNCEMENT**

**March 24, 2021 – Hamilton ON:** The MLPAO is deeply concerned to see a **complete lack of directed funding allocated towards the health human resources crisis in Ontario Laboratories**, in today's budget announcement.

The announced healthcare advances—COVID-19 testing and tracing, hospital expansions, long-term care—will not be remotely possible without also increasing laboratory staffing capacity. Direct funding is needed to address the staffing roadblocks: seats in medical laboratory science programs and clinical placements.

Although the 2021/22 Ontario Budget does include 2.3 billion for testing and contact tracing, investments are limited to instrumentation spending (more PCR instruments), increased front-end testing collection and Rapid Tests. Without funding allocated to address the **critical shortage of medical laboratory professionals**, any testing increases are untenable.

Minister Bethlenfalvy noted that the government's priority is investing in hospital beds "so patients can receive the care they need where and when they need it." Hospital expansions planned across the province in Brampton, Mississauga, Windsor, Chatham, London, and Ottawa will increase hospital beds by 30,000. Increasing hospital beds will increase laboratory testing—without more staff, patient care will be delayed as labs struggle to keep up.

As outlined in our Pre-Budget Submission received by the Ministry of Finance earlier this year, 70% of laboratories entered the pandemic short-staffed,<sup>1</sup> and the demand for Medical Laboratory Technologists (MLTs) is almost double the supply.<sup>2</sup> The closure of 7 MLT programs in the 90s has meant 43% of practicing MLTs are eligible to retire in the next 4-8 years.<sup>3</sup> This has been accelerated by the pandemic with 86% of laboratory professionals experiencing burnout after a year of testing 24/7, and are contemplating early retirement/leaving the profession (37%) or stress/sick leave (44%).<sup>4</sup>

We applaud the government for the investment in recruiting and training for 27,000 PSWs for Long-Term Care. This will go a long way to preventing further harm which, as Minister Bethlenfalvy correctly describes, has been "a tragedy decades in the making." The Auditor General's Special Report on Laboratory Testing this November **registered decades of healthcare professionals calling for support**—for education and training, modernization, equipment, and resources—which have gone unanswered.<sup>5</sup> As medical laboratory professionals burn out with no trained professionals to take their place, laboratory services will suffer. The resulting lengthening hospital stays and increasing wait times could bring a different sort of tragedy decades in the making.

Our laboratories are at a breaking point after the first year of COVID-19. The resounding absence of support combined with the dramatically increased workload the next two years outlined in this budget will crush them.

- Michelle Hoad, CEO, Medical Laboratory Professionals' Association of Ontario.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on a survey of lab leaders and professionals in May 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Based on data submitted by medical laboratory employers and HR departments in Fall 2020.

<sup>3</sup> [CMLTO Annual Report 2019](#), assuming retirement eligibility at 55.

<sup>4</sup> Based on a survey of medical laboratory professionals December 2020.

<sup>5</sup> [Office of the Auditor General, "Summary: Special Report on Laboratory Testing, Case Management and Contact Tracing," November 2020.](#)