



Town of Saugeen Shores
600 Tomlinson Drive, P.O. Box 820
Port Elgin, ON. N0H 2C0

Dear Dr. Patel,

Thank you for your service to and leadership of the Microbiology and Laboratory Science, Public Health Ontario Laboratory, and dedication to protecting the health of all Ontarians.

I would appreciate your immediate attention to the proposal submitted by the Grey Bruce Health Unit on the private drinking water testing program, especially “Phase 1 – Partial Service Restoration” related to service restoration in the Town of Saugeen Shores.

Public Health Ontario’s private drinking water testing program is a vital, high-demand service in Grey-Bruce that helps to ensure the water our rural families, farmers, visitors, and others rely on is safe to consume.

Key to the program’s success, equity, and accessibility in Grey-Bruce is having water sample pick-up and drop-off locations throughout the two counties due to the rural nature, geography, and size of the area. Simply put: a sufficient number of strategically placed locations is required for the program to adequately meet the needs of Grey-Bruce residents.

Due to the COVID-19 emergency, policy changes by Grey-Bruce hospitals in 2020 resulted in a reduction in the number of available pick-up/drop-off locations in Grey-Bruce from before the pandemic began. Consequently, the Grey Bruce Health Unit had to relocate the locations from hospitals to nearby grocery stores, which had been deemed essential businesses and agreed to serve as temporary locations.

Since spring 2022, the Grey Bruce Health Unit has been ready to restore the service to pre-pandemic levels, but was informed they would be unable to re-establish the locations at local hospitals.

Currently, there are only five permanent locations in Grey-Bruce’s 17 municipalities (a vast geographic area with a radius of about 2.5 hour drive), requiring residents in many communities, including Saugeen Shores, to travel a significant distance to drop off water samples to test for E. coli and other contaminants. Common road closures due to snowstorms in the area will soon further complicate access to this vital service.

Saugeen Shores has a substantial population, including a large seasonal population, that relies on private drinking water. Both Saugeen Shores and the Grey Bruce Health Unit have received public complaints about this gap in service.

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Providing a pick-up and drop-off location in Saugeen Shores would also make the program more accessible to residents in neighbouring Saugeen First Nation and the municipality of Arran-Elderslie, who also do not have a location within their boundaries.

It is worth noting that the Grey Bruce Health Unit has also identified clusters where private water contamination by E. coli is higher than the provincial norm. This is a serious concern. As you are aware, Grey-Bruce is home to the tragic Walkerton waterborne outbreak incident, where, in 2000, an E. coli outbreak in the town's drinking water supply sickened more than 2,000 people and resulted in six deaths.

The proposal includes a plan to close an existing service gap by placing a drop-off/pick-up location at the Saugeen Shores municipal office. Our council is fully behind this proposal and notes the location is only 0.2 kilometres from Highway 21 and the existing PHO courier route.

I fully support the Grey Bruce Health Unit's proposal, last re-submitted in October, to Public Health Ontario that would maintain the current level of service provided by the program in the short-term and gradually return the service to pre-pandemic levels. This would include restoring a location in Saugeen Shores.

On behalf of Saugeen Shores residents, I strongly request your support in ensuring the private drinking water testing program continues to be equitable and accessible in Saugeen Shores and Grey-Bruce. These are essential safeguards to the health of residents who consume and utilize water from wells and other private drinking water systems against serious and fatal waterborne infections and outbreaks.

I have a serious concern that not providing adequate, equitable access to a private water testing service in Grey-Bruce puts the health of people who rely on private drinking water at risk.

Thank you for your consideration of this request and the Grey Bruce Health Unit's proposal to protect the health of residents and visitors of Grey-Bruce communities.

Sincerely,



Luke Charbonneau, Mayor
Town of Saugeen Shores

CC: Medical Officer of Health for Grey Bruce Health Unit
Chief Medical Officer of Health for Ontario
Ministry of Health
Saugeen Shores Council