

June 16, 2020

Kristal Chopp, Mayor  
Chair of the Haldimand-Norfolk Board of Health  
Mayor of Norfolk County  
50 Colborn Street South  
Simcoe, Ontario  
N3Y 4H3

Dear members of the Haldimand-Norfolk Board of Health

We are contacting you as a member of the [Migrant Worker Health Expert Working Group](#), concerned about the health and safety of this population amidst the current pandemic. We are a volunteer group of academics and clinicians with decades of experience in infection control, occupational health and community-based research with migrant workers. We have formed together to provide evidence-based recommendations and resources to government and health officials in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, which can be found on our new website: <[www.migrantworker.ca](http://www.migrantworker.ca)>.

We are writing to you today in regard to the By-Law 2020-05-BH that affects migrant workers' housing.

We have had the opportunity to work with migrant agricultural workers for several years, as scholars and clinicians. We have also published several reports and academic publications outlining many of the challenges for this population to access health, social and legal services and support.

This expert working group brings decades of expertise and knowledge on the topic of migrant agricultural worker health. Among the many concerns that we have made public, it is clear to us that aggregate housing is one of the most dangerous hazards faced by migrant agricultural workers in Canada this season. We have urged the federal government to take leadership and improve housing standards for workers, particularly during the 14-day quarantine period. In fact, we have asked that the rest of Canada to follow BC's lead, in providing private hotel rooms for each worker during this period.

Therefore, it is our professional opinion that the medical officer's health decision to restrict 3 workers to 1 bunk-house during the quarantine period is both backed by science, and an

important precautionary step to prevent virus-spread, particularly when workers may be arriving from different regions of the country, along different travel routes to arrive at their workplace destination. In fact, our only concern with this current regulation is that perhaps it does not go far enough to prevent virus spread among this population.

We applaud the medical officer's leadership and initiative to keep workers safe and healthy, and it is our hope, that other regions will follow suite. While ideally, such regulations should be implemented at national or provincial levels, during a public health emergency, it makes good sense for regional authorities to take the lead when public health measures are lacking at the wider level.

While this is one of many actions that must be taken, we would be disappointed to see the health unit take a step backward in regard to current quarantine regulations. We understand that many farmers are upset and feel that their livelihood is threatened because of this regulation. The reality is that when/if more workers become sick because of inadequate quarantine measures, their livelihood will be even more threatened. So many sectors and individuals have been negatively affected by the current pandemic. Agricultural communities cannot put peoples' economic bottom line above peoples' basic health and survival.

Most recently, we have also had the opportunity to hear from many workers affected first-hand by outbreaks at Scottlyn Farm in the Norfolk-Haldimand region. Dozens of them have reached out to us and others in our network trying to find a way to return to their countries of origin. These workers feel abandoned and in grave danger. They also feel unduly blamed, when in fact, it is their living and working conditions that continue to make them more vulnerable to COVID-19.

If the agricultural communities that depend on these farmworkers are not able to ensure their health and safety during these times, shortages in agriculture may have lasting impacts beyond the pandemic period. Likewise, the government of Mexico has suspended migrant agricultural workers' arrival to Canada until more is known about the determining factors that resulted in the death of the 2 migrant workers in the Windsor region. Clearly, many have lost faith in Canadian communities' ability to safeguard the health and wellbeing of this population.

We would welcome the opportunity to provide further guidance and support to the medical officer of health in his endeavours to keep workers safe during these trying times.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our concerns.



C. Susana Caxaj, RN, PhD  
[scaxaj@uwo.ca](mailto:scaxaj@uwo.ca)  
School of Nursing  
University of Western Ontario

and



Jenna Hennebry, PhD  
Associate Professor  
Wilfrid Laurier University



Leah F. Vosko  
Professor of Political Science and Canada Research Chair  
York University



Stephanie Mayell, MA  
University of Toronto  
Department of Anthropology

On behalf of the [Migrant Worker Health Expert Working Group](#)

MIGRANT WORKER HEALTH EXPERT WORKING GROUP

The Migrant Worker Health Expert Working Group includes\*+:

Bob Barnettson, PhD, Professor, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Athabasca University C.

Susana Caxaj, RN, PhD, Assistant Professor, Arthur Labatt Family School of Nursing, Western University

Amy Cohen, MA, Professor, Anthropology Department, Okanagan College Donald Cole, MD, MSc, FRCP(C) Emeritus Professor, Dalla Lana School of Public Health, University of Toronto

Carlos Colindres MLT, MSc, CIC, Public Health Emergency Consultant, Complex Health, Disaster and Emergency Management Consulting Group

Natalie Drolet, MA, LLB, Executive Director/Staff Lawyer, Migrant Workers Centre BC

Jason Foster, PhD, Assoc. Professor, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Athabasca University

Jill Hanley, PhD, Assoc. Professor, School of Social Work, McGill University

Jenna L. Hennebry, PhD, Assoc. Professor, Balsillie School of International Affairs, Wilfrid Laurier University

Eduardo Huesca, MA, Migrant Farmworker Program Coordinator, Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers (OHCOW) Hamilton and Toronto Clinics

Stephanie Mayell, MA, Doctoral Student, University of Toronto, Department of Anthropology

Janet McLaughlin, PhD, Assoc. Professor, Faculty of Human and Social Sciences, Wilfrid Laurier University

Michelle Tew, RN, BScN, DOHS, COHN(C), Occupational Health Nurse, Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers (OHCOW) Hamilton Clinic

Leah Vosko, PhD, Professor, Faculty of Liberal Arts & Professional Studies, York University

\*The views expressed here do not necessarily represent the views of all members or the organizations where they work. +Names are listed in alphabetical order