

Protect Public Health Care

Now is the time we can make a difference

Ontario Health Coalition for quality public health care for all

More than a Band Aid: Putting Local Hospitals on the Agenda this Election



Jen Henderson is a wife, a grandmother and a farmer. In her Southwestern Ontario community, she has spent more time than she can measure in recent months, trying to ensure that her local hospital's Emergency Department and acute care beds stay open. Two years ago, Jen couldn't tell you what an acute care bed was. But when plans to close down these services were revealed she joined the mayor's new citizen's action group.

"They want to shut our ER at night and close down the hospital beds for the very sick," she reports. "But the London hospitals are full to overflowing and patients will be put at risk if they have to travel to other hospitals in the middle of the night, not to mention the ambulance costs. Businesses in our area have sent a letter to our local politicians telling them that our economy relies on having a full-service hospital here."

Jen is not alone. In Niagara, Joy Russell, retired from a hospital administrative position, is outraged that her hospital emergency department in Fort Erie has been

closed along with all surgeries and acute care beds. "It is more than an hour to get to the new hospital in St. Catharines. The remaining hospitals in the region are running at over 100% capacity and now they have an outbreak of C. difficile [a superbug] that has killed more than 30 people. People are waiting for days in the ERs," she says, the emotion evident in her voice.

Jen and Joy are on the front lines of an advocacy movement to protect and improve local hospital services. They are gearing up to make sure that politicians make firm commitments to reopen beds and restore services during the provincial election campaign. Ontario's hospitals are running at an average 98% capacity, a level of overcrowding unheard of in the industrialized world.

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The Cost of Privatization

Here is a sampling of real-world costs if the government privatized just a few of the services we currently receive fully-funded or subsidized publicly through our taxes:

- \$10,000+ per year primary school tuition per child
- \$20–\$30,000 per year private secondary school tuition
- \$20,000+ per year private university tuition
- \$700 - \$2,000+ for an MRI in a private for-profit clinic
- \$2,400–\$4,000 for cardiac catheterization
- \$12,000- \$14,600 for 2 days in Intensive Care Unit
- \$66,500 per year for a space in a nursing home

October 6th
Ontario
Election

A Voter's Guide

Where Do the Political
Parties Stand

on the Key Health Care
Issues?

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Top Four Reasons Tax Cuts Might Cost You More Than They Save

1. Tax cuts have reduced Ontario's budget by \$18 billion per year. That means \$18 billion each year is no longer available to fund the public services Ontarians rely on. This is more than the entire provincial deficit.

2. Ontario now funds our hospitals less than almost anywhere else in Canada. As a result hospital beds are being cut, services are being moved out of local communities, and overcrowding is rampant.

3. Only the very wealthy benefit. Economist Marc Lee reports that almost all Canadians see very little or no benefit from tax cuts. Only the top 10% of the income scale (individuals earning \$120,000 - \$266,000 or more per year) have profited from the tax cuts that began in the early 1990s.

4. The average Ontario family receives \$41,000 per year in tax-funded public services like health care and education report economists Hugh Mackenzie and Richard Shillington. These services are under threat as a result of tax cuts that mainly benefit the very wealthy at the expense of everybody else.


Voter's Guide

Where the Political Parties Stand on the Key Health Care Issues


Key Health Issue	Liberal Party	New Democratic Party	Progressive Conservative Party
Overcrowded hospitals— Restore hospital beds & services, Address staffing shortages	Planned hospital funding is set too low to protect existing services. Ongoing corporate tax cuts are reducing the provincial budget available to fund public services. More bed cuts and closures are on the horizon unless voters pressure for a stop to cuts and a clear promise to restore closed beds and improve access.	Funding unclear. The NDP promises to cut ER wait times in half but there is no clear plan to restore closed hospital beds and services. Voters need to pressure candidates to make firm commitments.	The PC Party commits to reducing ER wait times but there is no clear promise to restore closed hospital beds and services. We are concerned that PC promises for more tax cuts have to be paid for somehow. Unspecified cuts to public services are on the horizon unless voters pressure for a clear promise to restore closed beds and improve access in our local public non-profit hospitals. (See note under "Keep Health Care Public")
Huge wait lists for long-term care homes (nursing homes). Keep long-term care public and non-profit. Set a minimum care standard guaranteeing 3.5 hours of care per day for residents in long-term care homes.	Plans include a slow increase in new beds and renovations for older beds but not enough to offset the hospital cuts. New beds will continue to be privatized to for-profit corporations unless voters pressure for all new beds to be built in public and non-profit homes. There is currently no promise to improve hours of care.	The NDP promises to increase access to long term care but there is no clear promise on how many beds, nor on whether they would be public and non-profit or private and for-profit. No promise to improve hours of care.	Plans are for a slow increase in new beds and renovations for older beds but not enough to offset the hospital cuts. New beds will continue to be privatized to for-profit corporations unless voters pressure for all new beds to be built in public and non-profit homes. There is currently no promise to improve hours of care.
Improve access to public non-profit home care	Modest funding for home care will not reduce wait lists. The Liberal government has increased the amount of home care that people are allowed to get but inadequate funding means that many still don't get the care they need. Very slow progress on provincial standards for access to care. No commitment to build a public non-profit home care system. Voters need to pressure for improvements.	The NDP promises to improve access to home care and has opposed for-profit privatization of home care. They promise a review of the home care system, but voters need to pressure for a clear promise to create a stable public non-profit home care system.	Modest funding for home care that will not reduce wait lists. The Conservatives brought in the for-profit privatization of home care in the early 1990s. Voters need to pressure for a clear promise to increase home care and create a public non-profit home care system.
Keep health care public and non-profit	The Liberal government has stopped for-profit hospitals and clinics for the most part. But they continue to privatize long-term care and home care and cut public hospital services. Voters need to put pressure on to stop this. The Liberals have also enabled for-profit retirement homes to take an expanded role in the health care system including having locked units for elderly patients with dementia in violation of fundamental human rights.	Clear support for public non-profit hospitals and home care. Not clear on long term care beds (nursing homes). Promise to study home care privatization, but no clear promise to roll back the privatization in home care and build a public non-profit home care system.	The current Conservative platform does not make any promises either way on privatization. However, in the last provincial election, this party ran on a platform of for-profit privatization of health care services. Under the previous Harris government, privatization of long-term care homes and homecare was deepened and for-profit hospital clinics were introduced. For-profit MRI clinics siphoned scarce technologists out of local public hospitals, worsening shortages and reducing public MRI hours. We are concerned and encourage voters to push for a clear promise to keep health care public and stop privatization.
Protect rural health care	No promise.	No promise.	Promise to restore Emergency Department and acute beds in Fort Erie, Niagara. No promises on other small and rural hospitals.
Improve access to front-line care, with an emphasis on public service models — increase community health centres, nurse practitioners, family health teams and family doctors in areas that are underserved.	The Liberal government has increased medical school enrolment for family doctors, introduced nurse-led clinics, opened community health centres and increased family health teams. Need clear promises for help in underserved areas & where all physicians are aging.	The NDP promises to forgive student loans for physicians that locate in underserved areas as well as an expansion in family health teams. Need clear promises to approve the expansion of community health centres.	The PCs promise to encourage new graduates to locate in underserved areas. There are few details in their election platform. Voters need to pressure for clear promises and a commitment to support public models of service delivery.

A Closer Look


At the Health Care Issues that Matter to Ontarians this Election




18,500 hospital beds have been cut since 1990. In fact, Ontario has the lowest number of hospital beds per person of any province in Canada. As a result emergency departments are overflowing, staffing shortages are epidemic. Patients are forced out of hospital without adequate care and surgeries are cancelled because there are no beds. Staff-to-patient ratios are unsafe, and paramedics are forced to take ambulances off the road and wait hours to offload patients.




Chronic care hospital beds have been closed by the thousands — cut in half in recent decades — forcing more elderly and chronically ill patients out of hospital. But increases in long-term care home (nursing home) beds have not kept pace. There are now 23,000 Ontarians on wait lists for long-term care beds. For-profit companies that have received approvals to build beds in some communities have not come through, delaying further these needed beds. The most frequent complaint of both family members and long-term care staff is that there is not enough care in nursing homes. We need a minimum care standard of 3.5 hours per day to meet the needs of residents.




According to the Provincial Auditor General there are 10,000 people waiting for home care. Not only are home care wait lists huge but these lists only include the most acutely ill patients. Others who need services but are not at the top levels of need don't get on the list. Many simply can't get care. Since for-profit privatization of home care was introduced, the sector has been unstable and has huge administrative costs. Ontario has the most privatized home care system in the country. Ontario's next government must create a stable public non-profit home care system.



For-profit companies—many of them American-based or multinational—are trying to take over health care. For-profit clinics maximize their profits by charging user fees to patients and billing OHIP at the same time. They take scarce doctors, nurses and health professionals out of our local hospitals, reducing access to care for most patients. Every time hospitals are cut, new services are moved to private for-profit long-term care and home care companies. We need to insist that our politicians build new capacity in public non-profit institutions and protect services that are run in the public interest, not for private profits.



Smaller and rural hospitals have been put under threat by hospital deficits and an ideology that favours centralizing services to large towns. Hospitals in Burk's Falls and Shelburne have been closed. In Fort Erie and Port Colborne, all acute care, surgeries and emergency departments have been shut down. The future of hospitals and emergency departments in Wallaceburg, St. Marys, Petrolia, South Hampton and other communities are at risk. Voters need to pressure for clear promises.



Access to front-line medicine has been improving, but there are still Ontarians who need care and can't get it. There are a number of proposals for community health centres awaiting approval. In some communities, all the local physicians are aging and action needs to be taken now to ensure access is preserved when they retire.



Death and Taxes

Why too little of one might hasten the other...

Ontario faces a health care challenge and cuts to services threaten the health and well-being of patients. Ontario has already cut its hospital beds in half since 1990. Other hospital services have also been cut, including outpatient rehabilitation, speech-language pathology, foot care for people with diabetes, social work, and thousands of nurses and support staff.

- ⇒ 18,500 hospital beds have been cut since 1990.
- ⇒ Ontario now funds our hospitals less than virtually everywhere in Canada — \$194 less per person — or \$2.5 billion less for the whole province.

The results are all around us: closure of local ERs and movement of services out of town; elderly patients charged hundreds of dollars per day in an attempt to force them out of hospital when there is nowhere to go; overcrowded emergency departments; overwhelmed staff.

And the problem is not only in hospitals. Wait lists for care outside of hospital are too long.

- ⇒ Ministry of Health data reveals more than 20,000 people on wait lists for long-term care homes.
- ⇒ The Ontario Auditor General reports wait lists of 10,000 for home care.
- ⇒ Patients simply cannot afford the thousands of dollars it would cost to pay for care out-of-pocket.

The provincial election is on October 6 this year. Let's insist that our political parties and candidates commit to a democratic public health system — one in which Ontarians have a real say to ensure that funding goes to supporting and improving care. Let's ensure that we have a fair tax system that provides the care our communities need, when and where we need it.

Questions for Candidates

Here are some questions on the key issues to protect and improve public health care. You can help by picking a couple to ask your local provincial election candidates when they come to your door or in All-Candidates Meetings in your community.

1. Ontario's acute and chronic care hospital beds have been cut in half since 1990. In fact, more than 18,500 hospital beds have been cut. We now have the fewest beds per person of any province in the country. Hospital funding has been shrinking as a proportion of health care spending since at least 1980. Hospitals are overcrowded and waits in emergency departments are far too long. The cuts have gone too far and improving home care alone is not enough to solve these serious problems. Will you commit to improving hospital funding and restore hospital beds and services?
2. Families and residents in Ontario's long-term care homes (nursing homes) are suffering because these homes do not provide enough nursing and personal support care to meet residents' daily needs. Will you commit to establishing a minimum care standard of at least 3.5 hours of daily care for residents in these homes?
3. There are 10,000 people on wait lists for home care and even more are declined access to care. While home care funding has increased, it has not kept pace with patients downloaded out of hospitals. Will you commit to improving home care funding and improving access to this vital care?
4. Private for-profit clinics put profits before patient care — reducing quality of cleaning, charging user fees, and siphoning scarce doctors and health professionals out of local hospitals. For profit nursing homes have lobbied against regulated minimum care standards, even while raking in record profits. For profit home care companies have undermined working conditions for home visiting nurses and PSWs to the point of severe staffing shortages and extraordinary staff turnover. Will you commit to building all new capacity in the public non-profit system and stop privatization?
5. Home care competitive bidding has ushered in the for-profit privatization of this sector and has dramatically increased administrative costs. Will you commit to ending competitive bidding and bring in a public non-profit home care system as exists in every other province in Canada?
6. Will you commit to ensuring that hospital patients are not discharged from hospitals, or coerced to leave, without care in place?
7. There are 23,000 people on wait lists for long-term care (nursing home) beds across Ontario. For-profit nursing home companies have reneged on building beds in a number of communities, delaying the opening of new beds for years. In an attempt to protect and increase their profits, these same companies have lobbied against establishment of clear care standards that would ensure a minimum 3.5 hours of care per resident per day. They want more money with fewer strings attached. Will you speed up the opening of new beds and ensure that these are public and non-profit?
8. Smaller and rural hospitals are under threat of closure or dramatic cuts across Ontario. Will you commit to protecting acute and emergency care services in small and rural hospitals?
9. Will you commit to expanding public models of front-door medicine including community health centres, nurse practitioners, and aboriginal health centres?
10. What concrete commitments will your party make to improve access to nurse practitioners, family health teams and family doctors in underserved areas and in those areas where all the local physicians are aging?

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"More than a Band Aid: Putting Local Hospitals on the Agenda This Election"
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Cuts are affecting hospitals large, small and medium in every geographic area of the province. While small and rural hospitals have been put under threat of closure or their ERs are at risk of being shut down, large city hospitals are running at more than 100% capacity with patients on stretchers in hallways and ERs filled to overflowing.

In Ontario, acute and chronic care hospital beds have been cut in half since 1990. Mental health restructuring continues and access to mental health care beds and services all across Ontario is very poor. Outpatient physiotherapy has been cut in many communities, forcing people to pay for rehabilitation or go without.

While every government has covered the cuts with promises to move patients out of hospitals into long-term care homes and home care, the truth is that the growth in these community services have never kept pace with the hospital cuts. And every time hospitals are cut, new capacity is privatized to for-profit corporations.

There is no question that hospital bed and service cuts have gone too far. In the upcoming provincial election, voters need to put the brakes on hospital cuts and push candidates to commit to restoring beds and services in our local, non-profit hospitals.

**Pledge to make
health care
a key election
issue**

Please join this democratic process and take the pledge to vote for candidates who support these key health care commitments. You can see how many others in your riding have taken the pledge (and so can your local candidates). If thousands of Ontarians join in, we can protect and improve health care in the October 6 provincial election.

www.votehealthontario.ca