

# Ontario Health Coalition

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For Immediate Release

Attn: Assignment Editor

## Health Coalition Launches Giant Cross-Ontario Referendum to Save Our Local Public Hospitals

**In the Coalition's biggest campaign ever, more than a thousand volunteers will be going door-to-door starting today to ask Ontarians to vote in volunteer-led referendum to save our local public hospitals.**

**Voting stations to be set up across Ontario for massive community vote on Saturday April 5.**

Toronto – The Ontario Health Coalition announced the launch of a month-long door-to-door campaign across Ontario which will culminate in a massive province-wide vote on Saturday April 5. Ontarians will be asked to vote on the Ontario government's new plan to cut clinical services from local hospitals and contract them out to private clinics.

The ballot question is:

Choose one of the following:

- I support our local public hospitals. I do not want the government to cut their services or contract them out to private clinics.
- OR
- I support cutting services from our local public hospitals and contracting them out to private clinics.

Recently, the provincial government passed two new regulations to enable it to cut and privatize public hospital clinical services. The government has never brought the issue to the Ontario Legislature for a vote and Ontario voters have never given the government a mandate to cut and privatize care from Ontario's Public Hospitals. Regardless, the government has issued guidelines for proposals to Local Health Integration Networks to begin the process of cutting and contracting out the services. They plan to finalize contracts by mid-summer.

"Ontario's local public hospitals have already been cut more deeply than anywhere else in Canada, and it is beyond time that the cuts stop," said Natalie Mehra, Executive Director of the Ontario Health Coalition. "But with this plan, the Ontario government is making the cuts far worse. In a giant step towards American-style private health care, they plan to dismantle our local public hospitals, cut their funding and services, and hive them off to private clinics."

"This is a very real threat to single-tier public Medicare in Ontario. In British Columbia and Quebec, where private clinics have been allowed to propagate, patients are being illegally charged more than \$1,000 for an MRI, more than \$20,000 for hip surgery and more than \$1,000 for cataract surgery, in violation of the Canada Health Act. Already in Ontario where there are private clinics, the government is doing nothing to stop clinics that are charging illegal user fees in the hundreds or even thousands of dollars for services that are supposed to be covered by our public health plan; services we already pay for in our taxes and for which patients should never be billed," she added.

"Not only are there serious safety and quality problems in private clinics," added Mehra, but also, "Private clinics want to sell services to high-volumes of healthy patients that they can move in and out fast to make the most money. Patients, many of them elderly, would be forced to travel across a wide region, from one private clinic for one test, to another private clinic for a surgery, to another private clinic for another test. Local public hospitals will lose funding and scarce specialists and nurses to private clinics, but will be left with the heaviest care patients that the private clinics don't want because those patients are not profitable. It is the opposite of a community hospital where patients can get publicly-funded health care in one place close to home."

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