

March 23, 2016

Open Letter

The Honourable Kathleen Wynne,
Premier of Ontario
Room 281, Main Legislative Building,
Queen's Park,
Toronto, ON M7A 1A1

Dear Premier Wynne,

As presented, the 2016 Ontario Budget contains a plan to have many seniors pay substantially more for prescription drugs, based on their incomes. In addition, the government is planning to increase the co-payment for filling prescriptions. Under this plan, seniors with incomes over \$19,300 for a single person or \$32,300 for a couple, will have to pay nearly double the deductible before their drugs are covered. Deductible costs will increase from \$100 to as much as \$170. In addition, all seniors, regardless of income, will see their co-payment rise when they go in to get prescriptions filled.

Premier, we are asking you to cancel the fee increases for seniors and uphold the principle of universality for our health care system. As Ontario pays down its deficit, the fundamental values that underlie our public health care programs should not be abandoned.

Universal publicly-funded health care is understood as a fundamental value in Canada. The idea that the wealthy and the poor share the same health services and therefore have a common interest in its quality and success, is cornerstone to our health system.

This is the foundational belief for our public health care system, supported unanimously by all political parties when the Canada Health Act was passed, and it is the foundational value upon which we are calling for an expansion of public health care in Canada to cover a national prescription medicine program for all Canadians. Ontario has, in many ways, led that call. We are asking you not to break now with the principles that underlie that vision.

Public health care is about taking care of one another. We pay through our taxes for care when we are of working age and healthy --and we share the cost across society -- so that the burden for care is not shouldered by the sick, the elderly and the dying. This is a point of pride for most of us.

Already seniors face mounting out-of-pocket costs for long-term care, respite and medical supplies. As local hospital services are closed in more and more towns, seniors face

significant new costs for rehabilitation, lab tests, and travel costs. Unofficially, home care is already subject to means-testing, forcing families to shoulder ever more of the expense. When one adds to these existing user costs to the planned higher deductibles and co-payments for drugs, the burden for middle income seniors is becoming unbearable.

In fact, Premier, as you know, across Canada, the progressive public interest organizations that work on health care are advocating for the principles of the Canada Health Act not only to be safeguarded in hospitals and clinics, but also extended to cover home care and drugs in a bid to protect equity and reduce suffering as health care is reformed.

It is distressing to see the Ontario government moving in the opposite direction.

That our public services should enhance social cohesion and improve equity is a quintessentially *liberal* idea. Indeed, the universality and equity principles were written into the Canada Health Act under the Liberal government of Pierre Trudeau and Health Minister Monique Bégin. They have been upheld by governments of all stripes since. They should not be abandoned lightly.

Ontario already has a means-tested method to provide income for needed health care services. It is called the tax system. Through the rebuilding of a progressive tax system that asks the wealthy and corporations to pay their fair share, funding can be raised for needed care and services. Premier, there is no reason to increase user fees on people when they are elderly, sick, dying and least able to pay. Respectfully, we ask you to reconsider the policy direction of dismantling universality and subjecting more health care services to user fees at point of need.

Sincerely,

John Maxwell, Executive Director **AIDS Committee of Toronto**

Derrell R. Dular, Managing Director **Alliance of Seniors/ Older Canadians Network**

Roslyn Harris, Chair **Association of Jewish Seniors**

Michael McMahon, Chair **Belleville Health Coalition**

Curtis Coates & Mary Jane Froats, Co-Chairs **Brockville Health Coalition**

Wanda Tucker, Chair **Campbellford Health Coalition**

John Meguerian, Vice Chair **Canadian Association of Retired Persons – Niagara Chapter**

Sean Meagher, Executive Director **Canadian Doctors for Medicare**

Barbara Santosuosso, Program Manager **Canadian Treatment Action Council**

Fred Hahn, President & Candace Rennick, Secretary-Treasurer **Canadian Union of Public Employees Ontario**

Rob Driskell, President **Canadian Union of Public Employees – Local 4000**

Josephine Grayson, Chair **Care Watch**

Shirley Roebuck, Chair **Chatham-Kent Health Coalition**

Andrew Lee, President **Chinese Golden Age Club of Mississauga**

Marlene Beaman-McQuay, Co-Chair **City of Kawartha Lakes Health Coalition**

Malcolm Buchanan, President **Congress of Union Retirees – Hamilton, Burlington & Oakville Council**

Lyle Hargrove, President **Congress of Union Retirees – South Central Council**
Barry Stevens, President **Congress of Union Retirees – Toronto Area Council**
Treena Hollingworth, Chair **Concerned Citizens – Stratford Area**
Georgie Clarke, President **Concerned Friends of Ontario Citizens in Care Facilities**
Michael Butler, National Health Care Campaigner **Council of Canadians**
Roy Brady, Chapter Chair **Council of Canadians – Peterborough – Kawarthas Chapter**
Fiona McMurrin, Chapter Chair **Council of Canadians – South Niagara Chapter**
Douglas Hayes, Chapter Chair **Council of Canadians – Windsor – Essex Chapter**
David Rogers, President of the Board of Directors **Creekside Senior's Estates**
Charlie Courneyea & Trish McAuliffe, Co-Chairs **Durham Health Coalition**
Kimberly DeYong, Chair **Essex County Health Coalition**
George Kelly, Chairperson **Guelph / Wellington Coalition for Social Justice**
Kevin Smith, President **Grey Bruce Labour Council**
Dr. Ted Haines, Member & Rolf Gerstenberger, Co-Chair **Hamilton Health Coalition**
Tara Kainer, Justice, Peace & Integrity of Creation Committee of the Sisters of Providence of St. Vincent de Paul, Kingston, ON
Harold Pickering, Co-Chair **Kingston Health Coalition**
Jo-Anne M. Boulding, Barrister, Solicitor and Executive Director **Lake Country Community Legal Clinic**
Claire Bélanger, President **Le Centre des aînés francophones de Port Colborne**
James Mulhern, President **Lindsay & District Labour Council**
Peter Bergmanis, Co-Chair **London Health Coalition**
Susan Doyle, Executive Director **Lumacare**
Bob Harrick, Chair **Mississauga Seniors' Council**
Dr. Amarjit Banwatt, President **Mississauga Seniors Club**
Zul Kassamali, President **Multicultural Council for Ontario Seniors**
Herb John, President **National Pensioners Federation**
Sue Hotte, Chair **Niagara Health Coalition**
Sue McIntyre, Co-Chair **North Bay Health Coalition**
Erin Harris, Past-President **Older Women's Network**
Sayed Hassan Fazl, Director **Ontario Afghan Family and Seniors Services Association**
Michael Hurley, President **Ontario Council of Hospital Unions**
Suzanne Clancy, President **Ontario Federation of Union Retirees**
Natalie Mehra, Executive Director **Ontario Health Coalition**
Eugene Lefrancois, President **Ontario Network Injured Workers Group**
Warren (Smokey) Thomas, President **Ontario Public Services Employees Union**
Mike Donaldson, President **Ontario Public Services Employees Union – Local 464**
Tara Maszczakiewicz, President **Ontario Public Services Employees Union – Local 684**
Gareth Jones, Executive Board Member **Ontario Public Services Employees Union – Region 4**
Paul Elliott, President **Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation**
Mary Lou Cunningham, President **Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation – Active Retirees Members Chapter 11 Thames Valley**

Manfred Netzel, President Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation – Active Retirees Members Chapter 12 Toronto

Stuart Ryan, Co-Chair Ottawa Health Coalition

Bryan J. Smith, Chair Oxford Coalition for Social Justice

Marion Burton, President Peterborough and District Labour Council

Charlene Avon & Roy Brady, Co-Chairs Peterborough Health Coalition

Threasa Watchorn, Manager Port Colborne Senior Centre

Len Hope, Chair Port Elgin Health Coalition

Doris Grinspun, Chief Executive Officer Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario

Bob Martin, Chair Ritz Lutheran Villa

Shirley Roebuck, Chair Sarnia Lambton Health Coalition

Margo Dale, Chair Sault Ste. Marie Health Coalition

Ron Sim, General Manager Sault Ste. Marie Soup Kitchen Community Centre

Sue Hotte, Chair Save the Welland Hospital Group

Karu Navarajnarajah, Sri Lankan Tamil Seniors Group of Etobicoke

Doug Macpherson, National Coordinator Steelworkers Organization of Active Retirees

Dorothy Klein, Co-Chair Sudbury Health Coalition

Elizabeth Forestell, Executive Director The Neighborhood Group

Greg Snider, President Thunder Bay and District Injured Workers Support Group

Jules Tupker, Co-Chair Thunder Bay Health Coalition

Phyllis Creighton, Toronto Raging Grannies

Jerry Dias, President Unifor

Len Hope, Executive Board Member Unifor Retired Workers Council

Les MacDonald, Chairperson Unifor – Local 222 Retired Workers Chapter – Oshawa

Roxie Baker, Chairperson Unifor – Local 1325 Retired Workers Chapter – Stratford

Bob Such, Chairperson Unifor – Local 1520 Retired Workers Chapter – London

Gerry Graham, President United Senior Citizens of Ontario

Phuoc Tran, President Vietnamese Cambodian Laotian Services Association

Ken Lewenza Jr., Co-Chair Windsor Health Coalition

Pat Armstrong, Distinguished Research Professor of Sociology York University