

# Ontario Health Coalition

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July 8, 2014

Attn: Assignment Editor

For Immediate Release

## **More than 80,000 Ontarians Vote to Stop Wynne Government Plan to Cut Local Community Hospitals and Contract Out Care to Private Clinics Health Care Advocates Call On the Premier and New Health Minister to Stop the Privatization Plan**

One of the first major controversial issues faced by Ontario's new Health Minister is the government's plan to cut clinical services from local public hospitals and contract them out to regional private clinics.

Today at the Ontario Legislature, hundreds of health care advocates representing every region of Ontario gathered to deliver more than 80,000 votes cast in a volunteer-led referendum that asked Ontarians whether or not they want to see their local public hospital services cut and contracted out to private clinics. The vote demonstrates that public opposition to the cuts to community hospitals and contracting out to private clinics is overwhelming. After the media event, approximately 100 coalition volunteers from across Ontario will spend the afternoon meeting with MPPs to raise their concerns.

The referendum results:

- 82,013 votes were cast by Ontarians
- 81,733 voted to support their local hospitals and stop the cuts and contracting out of services to private clinics
- 119 voted to support cutting services from local hospitals and contracting them out to private clinics
- 161 ballots were spoiled

This private clinics plan was never brought to the Ontario Legislature for debate, instead it was passed quietly into regulations by cabinet in January. The government plans to sign the first contracts with private clinics this summer.

In response, the Ontario Health Coalition held a volunteer-led referendum in which we asked people to vote whether they want to see local hospital services cut and contracted out to private clinics. Voting stations have been set up across Ontario for the last 2 ½ months in farmers markets; on street corners; in stores and malls; in workplaces; in churches and other institutions of faith; on university campuses and many other locations. More than 100 voting stations were staffed by volunteers across Ontario. More than 200 workplace votes were held.

Private clinics have been a touchstone issue for public health care advocates across Canada. The clinics have been openly flaunting the Canada Health Act, extra-billing patients and trying to dismantle single-tier Medicare.

"Almost no one wants to see medical care cut from their local hospitals and contracted out to private clinics," said Natalie Mehra, executive director of the Ontario Health Coalition. "We have repeatedly studied the impacts of private clinics on access to care and equity, and we have found that privatizing the ownership of hospitals by handing services to private clinics results in two-tier health care and extra charges for patients. These clinics cost more. They do not serve the public interest. They are a threat to single-tier Medicare and locally accessible health care, and we are asking the Premier to stop them."

The Ontario Health Coalition is the largest public interest group on health care in Ontario with more than 400 member organizations including: faith groups; student chapters; social justice organizations; non-profit community groups; unions; nurses' associations; doctors' organizations; women's groups; seniors' organizations and many more. The coalition's mandate is to uphold single-tier Public Medicare under the principles of the Canada Health Act.

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