

# Ontario Health Coalition

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## Ontario Provincial Election 2014 Suggested Questions for Candidates

*There are 12 questions below for you to choose from. These questions are a guide to help you form your own questions for candidates. We have included key facts and figures for you to include in the preamble to your question if you have time. If you have local information on these issues, it is best to slot it in place of the general province-wide information.*

### Hospitals

1. This question is for all candidates:

18,500 hospital beds have been closed in Ontario since 1990. Ontario now has the fewest hospital beds and funds our hospitals at the lowest rates per person in the country.

In the latest provincial budget, community hospitals would have seen their funding levels set below the rate of inflation for the fifth year in a row. This would mean more cuts to needed care services, more mergers, more movement of services out of local towns and worse health care privatization.

What is your party's position on funding Ontario's hospitals? Will you commit to ensuring that base funding for hospitals meets inflation and population growth needs at minimum and what action will you take to stop the cuts?

For rural Ontario hospitals in particular:

In small and rural communities, our hospitals are vital to our economy and provide life-saving care. But year after year more and more services get cut. (Insert local cuts. If relevant, note that your local hospital has been cut to the point that its future is at risk.)

How will you protect the interests of rural Ontarians by ensuring the viability of our local community hospitals? Will you commit to establishing a basic set of needed hospital services that will be maintained in every small and rural hospital in Ontario?

2. For Conservative candidates:

The PC Party has a written plan for health care that includes a plan to merge all 146 public hospitals in Ontario covering more than 200 local community hospital sites into 30 – 40 giant hospital corporations that they call "hubs". These would be mega-mergers – taking more than 200 local community hospital sites and merging them into 30 – 40 hospital corporations with appointed, rather than elected Boards.

The last round of mergers under Harris were supposed to cut duplicate administration costs. But in the end Ontario's Auditor found they cost \$3.9 billion to lay off staff, close beds and move services around; led to the closure of approximately more than 10,000 hospital beds; and cut and privatized services that have never been replaced. Executive salaries in the merged hospitals are through the roof, even though many of our local community hospitals have lost services every year since the mergers.

This new mega-merger plan – which would result in giant hospital corporations with less local control – risks billions in extra costs and jeopardizes our local services.

How would our local hospital services be guaranteed under such a scheme? Will you commit to stopping the mega-merger of our local hospital into one giant regional hospital and guarantee that our hospital services will remain intact here in our community?

3. For Liberal & Conservative candidates:

The government introduced two new regulations in January to cut local hospital services and contract them out to private clinics. These private clinics are to be high-volume “factories” that treat thousands of patients.

The PC party platform calls for contracting out of local hospital services ranging from food services to MRIs and other clinical care.

Not only would these plans take hospital services out of local communities to centralized high-volume private clinics, but private clinics across Ontario are already charging user fees and extra billing (which means they are billing OHIP and charging user fees ranging up to hundreds or even thousands of dollars to patients on top).

What will you do to stop the private clinics and ensure that any reform takes place under the Public Hospitals Act not as privatized independent health facilities? What commitment will your political party make to keep hospital services in our community and stop them from being moved out to centralized clinics?

4. For NDP candidates:

The NDP leader has committed to eradicating Ontario’s deficit following the same timelines as the Liberal Party. There is no mention of stopping the private clinics in the NDP platform.

How will you ensure that hospital funding improves and the cuts to local hospital services are stopped under this fiscal plan? Will you commit to protecting current levels of services in our local hospitals? What will you do to stop the private clinics?

## Home Care

5. For Liberal and NDP candidates:

18,500 hospital beds have been closed in Ontario since 1990. As more and more patients continue to be offloaded from hospitals into home care, home care funding has not kept pace with the need for home care services and those who need care to age at home have faced severe rationing of publicly funded care.

Funding increases were promised in the most recent budget, which would have brought funding back in line with funding per home care client in the late 1990s/early 2000s.

Added to this, there are approximately 1,000 companies with home care contracts in Ontario. Each of these companies has a duplicate administration, computer systems, bidding systems, scheduling, travel costs etc.

Ontario has the most privatized home care in the country and profit-taking added to all of this duplication is taking money away from care.

Will you take steps to stop the privatization of Ontario's home care system? Will you create a public non-profit home care system and get rid of profit taking and competitive bidding for good and put the money saved towards improving access to care and conditions for care workers?

6. For Conservative candidates:

The PC Platform calls for the creation of a private home care system in which patients (or home care clients) are directly given money and hire and fire their own caregivers directly. This type of system is open to all kinds of abuse both by unscrupulous clients who misuse the money and people they hire who misuse the money. It undermines the attempts to improve the training, working conditions and professionalism of care workers in the home care sector.

What will you do to ensure the safety of the residents and staff in this privatized home care system? There are no controls and no protections listed in the platform. How will you ensure that actual care is being provided for the public funding given out without any agency to oversee it? How will you address worsened staff shortages in the public home care system under this plan?

## **Long-Term Care**

7. As hospital beds have been cut and patients moved out quicker and sicker, care needs in long-term care homes have increased dramatically. But actual care levels have not increased accordingly.

Almost 2/3 of residents have dementia and many have aggressive behaviours.

Families that have money often find themselves in need of hiring in additional caregivers to provide for the basic needs of their aging parents. Others who do not have families nearby or who do not have tens of thousands of dollars to hire extra care, go without.

Long-term care home staff frequently complain about the complexity of care required, about patients with psychiatric needs for whom the staff is not trained, about homes working short-staffed virtually all the time

There have been 29 homicides in Ontario's long-term care homes since 2002 according to Ontario's Chief Coroner. . The situation is unsafe for both residents and staff.

Would your party commit to setting and enforcing a 4-hour minimum care standard – that is a mandatory care standard of an average of four hours of hands-on care per day for residents living in long term care facilities?

## **Primary and Community Health Care**

8. For all parties:

Several reforms suggested link physicians with hospitals through various informal and formal linkages. Nurses, health professionals and the rest of the health care team are ignored in these proposals.

What will your party commit to do to enhance team-based primary care and support the whole team in health care?

## **Stopping Privatization**

### 9. For Liberal candidates:

Services that are being cut from hospitals are almost always privatized. As public non-profit hospital beds are cut, they are replaced, when they are actually replaced at all, with for-profit long-term care, for-profit home care, for-profit rehabilitation and private clinics.

In addition to the privatization of the ownership of health care provision, there has also been a proliferation of user fees for patients. New user fees for seniors' drugs have been introduced, and the Minister of Health recently announced means-testing (and therefore more user fees) for home care.

What will you do to ensure that your party upholds its longstanding commitment to a universal public health care system? (Universality means no income-testing or means-testing.) What will you do to stop privatization and ensure that all new capacity is built in the public-non-profit health care system?

### 10. For Conservative candidates:

Services that are being cut from hospitals are almost always privatized. After the round of hospital restructuring under the Mike Harris government, as public non-profit hospital beds are cut, they are replaced, when they are actually replaced at all, with for-profit long-term care, for-profit home care, for-profit rehabilitation and private clinics.

In addition to the privatization of the ownership of health care provision, there has also been a proliferation of user fees for patients. New user fees for seniors' drugs were introduced under the Mike Harris government, and access to public homecare was strictly rationed forcing more patients to pay user fees.

In the new PC Party White Paper on Health Care, the plan calls for "commissioning" or contracting out of a whole range of services.

Will you commit publicly to stopping privatization of the ownership of public and non-profit health care services? What will you do to reduce user fees and uphold single-tier Medicare?

### 11. For NDP Candidates:

There is no mention of stopping health care privatization in the NDP platform.

Will you commit to stopping the cuts to and privatization of public and non-profit owned health care services? What will you do to reduce user fees and uphold single-tier Medicare?

## **P3 Hospitals**

12. The privatized P3 hospitals are proven to be much more expensive than normal publicly-financed hospitals. A recent University of Toronto study found them to be 18% more expensive. The Ontario Auditor General found the Brampton P3 hospital to be \$200 million more than if that hospital was built publicly.

P3s bind Ontarians into paying long-term privatization contracts that stretch 30-years – even though we do not know what technological changes will bring for health care 30 years down the road.

With billions earmarked for new infrastructure projects, the lessons of the gas plant fiasco (which was a P3 deal gone bad) just like the lessons of the 407 P3 deal have still not been learned.

What will you do to stop the P3 privatization of new hospitals?