

Ontario Health Coalition

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Attn: Assignment Editor

Ontario Health Coalition Organizes Democratic Public Hearings On Small, Rural and Northern Hospitals with Panel of Experts: Coalition Has Lost Confidence in Government's Failure to Consult with Public

Starting March 4th, 2010, the Ontario Health Coalition is organizing 12 democratic public consultations in every region of the province on the future of rural and northern hospitals.

The OHC is inviting the public and local organizations to bring their concerns and recommendations about their local hospital services to a non-partisan panel, made up of well-respected experts. Panelists include:

Dr. Claudette Chase, Sioux Lookout
Hon. Roger Gallaway, retired MP, Lib. Sarnia Lambton
France Gelinias, MPP, NDP Health Critic, Nickel Belt
Dr. Tim Macdonald, Petrolia
Natalie Mehra, Director, Ontario Health Coalition
Barb Proctor, Ret'd RN, Picton
Kay Tod, Ret'd RN, Burk's Falls

"Since last summer, we have asked the government to conduct meaningful public consultations as their hospital policies are fundamentally changing the public's access to needed health care," stated Natalie Mehra, director of the Ontario Health Coalition. "But when the McGuinty government revealed the mandate of their rural and northern panel last fall, not only does it fail to mention the word "hospital", there were no plans to conduct public hearings until after the panel had completed its work and made its recommendations to the Minister of Health."

"The government's initiative is tightly controlled by the same bureaucracy that has created the conditions for the cuts to and closures of small, rural and remote hospitals, contrary to the fundamental priorities and values of Ontarians. We have lost faith with this process and decided to set up our own high-profile, non-partisan panel to hear from communities about their needs, ideas and concerns regarding the future of their local hospitals," continued Ms. Mehra. "Ontarians fund our hospitals. We rely on them from birth to death. It is unbecoming of a parliamentary democracy to make a policy change - like the closure of hospitals it has taken more than half a century to build - without full disclosure, full consideration of all the options and meaningful public discussion."

"We will collect concerns and ideas from as many people and groups as possible in every region of the province and create our own report," added Kay Tod, Ret'd RN from Burk's Falls, one of the panelists. "The report will be released publicly and brought into the legislature and given to the Premier and the Health Minister. We hope to ensure that the voices of Ontarians -- their ideas and concerns -- are heard."

In order to book a spot to make a presentation (7 mins), please contact us as soon as possible and leave us your phone number(s), the town at which you would like to present, and any preferred times.

Deadlines to book presentations: for Wallaceburg, Shelburne & Kincardine - 5 pm, Friday, February 26. For Welland, Cobourg, Port Perry, Haliburton and Burk's Falls 5 pm Monday, March 1. For Winchester, Picton, St. Joseph Island and New Liskeard 5 pm Monday March 15.

For written submissions, please send them in by the date of the local hearing nearest you.

Hearing Dates and Locations:

Wallaceburg Thursday, March 4, 3 - 6:30 pm, Oaks Inn, 80 McNaughton Ave.

Shelburne Friday, March 5, 3 - 6:30 pm, Grace Tipling Hall, 203 Main St.E.

Kincardine Saturday, March 6, 12 - 3:30 pm, The Davidson Centre, 601 Durham St.

Welland Tuesday, March 9, 3 - 6:30 pm, Lion's Club, 414 River Rd.

Cobourg Wednesday, March 10, 3 - 6:30 pm, Lions Club, 157 Elgin St. E.

Port Perry Thursday, March 11, 3 - 6:30 pm Greenback Centennial Hall, 19965 Hwy 12.

Haliburton Friday, March 12, 3 - 6:30 pm, Minden Arena, 55 Parkside Ave.

Burk's Falls Saturday, March 13, 12 - 3:30 pm, Arena, 220 Centre St.

Winchester Tuesday, March 23, 3 - 6:30 pm, Chesterville Community Hall, 1 Mill St., Chesterville.

Picton Wednesday, March 24, 5 -8:30 pm, Picton Arena, 375 Main St.

St. Joseph Island Friday, March 26, 3 - 6:30 pm,Johnson Township Arena, 1 Johnson Dr., Desbarats.

New Liskeard Saturday, March 27, 1 - 4:30 pm, Quality Inn, 998009 Hwy 11.

For more information please contact:

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Background on Democratic Public Hearings for Small, Rural and Northern Hospitals

Hospital funding has failed to keep pace with inflation over the last two years. This has thrown the majority of Ontario's hospitals into deficits which they are required to eliminate by law, even if it means cutting needed services. Small and rural hospitals have been particularly hard hit. Entire floors have been closed. Emergency rooms have been shut down. Programs like physiotherapy, chiropody and labs have been privatized. Services like birthing and mammography have been closed. Ontarians are being forced to travel further and further away, without the transportation systems and supports to access hospital services.

The impact on patients includes longer waits as regional hospitals are swamped with more patients and inadequate resources, higher infection rates, new user fees for patients, loss of services, long waits. In some cases, entire hospitals are being closed down or threatened with closure.

In response to a major protest of more than 1000 people at the Ontario Legislature in April, the Minister of Health announced a Panel on Rural and Northern Health Care. It was understood that this panel would be an independent look at the crisis faced by small and rural hospitals. However, when the panel's mandate was finally released last fall, it did not even include the word "hospital" and made no mention of the crisis our local hospitals are facing. It is no longer clear what the panel is going to do. There are no public consultations until after the panel has finished its work. The panel has refused to meet with any patient's groups, municipal groups, community groups, the health coalition, unions and other key stakeholders.

In response, the OHC has formed a non-partisan panel to hear from Ontarians in 12 regional public hearings. The coalition will create a report from the hearings to be released to the media, brought into the legislature, and given to the Minister of Health and the Premier.

