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For Immediate Release

Attn: Assignment Editor

McGuinty Warned to Stop Health Care Privatization: OHC Responds to Drummond Commission

Toronto – In a press conference this morning at the Ontario Legislative building, the Ontario Health Coalition warned the McGuinty government not to accept recommendations that include cuts and privatization of hospital and health care services.

Don Drummond, a former bank executive appointed to head this government's Commission on Public Service Reform, has used the enhanced platform afforded him by McGuinty to become a spokesperson recommending health care privatization across Canada. In the last year alone, Drummond has been involved as an advisor, spokesperson and author of numerous reports on health care reform. In every report to date, Drummond has participated in recommending health care privatization, something the Finance Minister and Premier promised would not be part of the Commission's mandate. He has repeatedly called the Canada Health Act "irrelevant" though it protects Canadians from user fees for their hospital beds and services. The Canada Health Act has been used to force the repayment of patients who have been charged illegal fees through extra-billing and user fees.

"The McGuinty government has no mandate whatsoever to privatize health care. They have run three elections with the promise to protect and improve *public* health care," noted Natalie Mehra, coalition director. "We are deeply concerned about Drummond's repeated exhortations in favour of private for-profit hospitals and clinics. The evidence shows poorer quality and higher costs in private clinics. For-profit privatization of hospitals and clinics leads to two-tier health care: one system for the rich and poorer access to care for everyone else. We have researched virtually all private clinics that have emerged across Canada and we found that the vast majority of private for-profit clinics charge extra user fees to patients and sell two-tier health care to the rich even in violation of the Canada Health Act, while reducing access to care in our local hospitals."

"The public does not support the idea that a corporation should make profit from a person suffering with cancer," added Derrell Dular, board member of the OHC and Managing Director of the Older Canadians Network. "Handing the control of our health care institutions to for-profit corporations means that profit-taking comes at the expense of quality care and drives up costs. It violates deeply-held values of Ontarians."

He also warned about hospital cuts. "Every round of hospital cuts for the last 15 years has been accompanied by more for-profit privatization. Seniors have been hit hard as increases in home care and long-term care have never kept pace with hospital cuts. We now face serious waiting lists for nursing homes and inadequate home care where the impact of for-profit ownership and control are also evident. The for-profit companies have lobbied for changes that give them more money with less strings attached, standing in the way of improvements in care."

"Today we are issuing a warning. We will strongly oppose any so-called "reform" that leads to the privatization of our health care system," concluded Ms. Mehra. "Fair and equal access to health care relies on building capacity and improving the democracy and quality in our public health care system. Privatization would destroy this potential."

The coalition released a backgrounder listing Don Drummond's involvement in health care reports over the last two years. The backgrounder and an open letter to the Premier can be accessed at: www.ontariohealthcoalition.ca

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For more information: Ontario Health Coalition 416-441-2502.