

Ontario Health Coalition

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For Immediate Release

Attn: Assignment Editor

Health Coalition Issues Pre-Drummond Report Warning of Major Health Cuts

Toronto – Though Ontario's public has never been properly informed about the plans, the provincial government is planning severe curtailment of health care funding growth that will result in \$3 billion or more to be carved out of hospitals and OHIP, warned the Ontario Health Coalition in a new report released today. If the provincial government adopts the recommendation of former TD banker Don Drummond, Chair of the government's Commission on Public Service Reform, the cutbacks will increase to \$4 billion. Don Drummond's report, which will contain recommendations to restructure Ontario's health care system, is expected to be released next Wednesday.

"The Health Minister has disguised radical plans for cutbacks by calling them "trade-offs" and "reforms""", noted Sue Hotte, a retiree and board member of the Ontario Health Coalition. "But if you look at the government's plans closely you can see that the numbers just don't add up. The bottom line is that they are planning to cut hospital services without providing enough money to support the existing patients languishing on wait lists for nursing homes and home care. There is simply no capacity to cut more hospital beds and download more patients."

"The evidence from the government's own spending plans shows that the planned cuts to hospital services will cause even worse rationing of home care because there will be less money available for each home care client," added Natalie Mehra, coalition director. "Funding for home care is already declining as a share of health spending. There is already less money available per home care client, meaning that care is more severely rationed and seniors are forced to pay user fees for needed services. This will just make it worse."

"The public has been subjected to a barrage of PR dedicated to creating a crisis to justify major restructuring," she added. "But the evidence does not support the claims. Ontario is eighth out of ten provinces in health spending. We are already near the bottom of the country. The evidence shows that if anything is eating up the provincial budget, it is not health care, it is tax cuts. The planned service cuts will cause worsening access to care for seniors in order to pay for tax cuts that mainly benefit the wealthy and corporations."

The coalition recommends that the government close two loopholes in the Employer Health Tax to ensure that high income earners pay a fairer share. This measure would generate \$2.4 billion to help relieve some pressure, according to an analysis by economist Hugh Mackenzie.

The report lists a litany of urgent and unmet health care needs that are not being addressed. Among the key findings:

- The Ontario Auditor General has revealed that government funding projections for the next two years mean \$1 billion would have to be carved out of hospital spending and \$2.05 billion out of OHIP. At the same time, home care funding increases would be less than 1/3 of the rate of the last eight years and long-term care homes' funding would be ½ the rate of the last eight years.
- More than 30,000 Ontarians are waiting for a hospital bed, long-term care placement or home care.
 - 24,000 Ontarians are on wait lists for long-term care placement.
 - 10,000 Ontarians are on wait lists for home care.
 - At any given time, 592 Ontarians are waiting in emergency departments for hospital beds.
 - 2,271 Alternate Level of Care (ALC) patients are waiting in hospital for a long-term care bed, while 773 ALC patients are waiting in hospital for another type of hospital bed and 135 ALC patients are waiting in hospital for home care.
- Ontario ranks at the bottom of comparable jurisdictions in emergency department wait times for admission to hospital, a key indicator of hospital bed shortages.

The details of the recommendation and the full report are at www.ontariohealthcoalition.ca

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