

Ontario Health Coalition

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Attention Assignment Editor

No Vacancy: Ontario Health Coalition Finds Hospital Overcrowding at Untenable Levels

Toronto – A new report, “No Vacancy: Hospital Overcrowding in Ontario, Impact on Patient Safety and Access to Care” released today finds that Ontario has the fewest hospital beds per person of all provinces in Canada. The result is serious hospital overcrowding that puts patients at risk.

Among the report’s key findings:

- More than 18,500 hospital beds have been closed since 1990.
- Ontario’s hospital occupancy rate is 97.8%, compared to average occupancy rates of 75% in the OECD and 68.2% in the United States.
- Ontario has the fewest hospital beds per person of any province in Canada.
- Ontario is fourth last in the OECD in numbers of hospital beds per person, followed only by Turkey, Chile and Mexico. In fact, Ontario has half the number of hospital beds per person compared to the OECD average. (Ontario is at 2.5 hospital beds per 1,000 population. OECD average excluding Canada is 5.2 hospital beds per 1000 population.)
- Hospital bed cuts have not been offset by increases in care outside of hospitals. Approximately 10,000 people are on wait lists for home care in Ontario and more than 23,000 people are on wait lists for long term care homes.
- Alternate Level of Care patients number 4,093 across Ontario, but 911 of these patients are waiting for care in hospital. Of the 3,182 waiting for care outside of hospital, 2,271 are waiting for a space in a long term care home and 196 are waiting for home care. Even if all Alternate Level of Care patients were discharged, Ontario would still have hospital occupancy rates far higher than other comparable jurisdictions.

The consequences of overcrowded hospitals include

- Overcrowded emergency departments
- Cancelled surgeries
- Coercive tactics used to force patients out of hospital against their choice
- Inappropriate staffing ratios
- Increased hospital-acquired infections
- Poorer health outcomes and increased mortality rates

“Ontario’s hospital occupancy levels are at untenable levels, far above other comparable jurisdictions. For patients, this means a higher risk of hospital infections, cancelled surgeries, backlogged ERs, not enough staff, and patients waiting on stretchers for hours or even days,” said Natalie Mehra, director of the Ontario Health Coalition. “Yet Ontario has not done a systematic study to assess hospital occupancy and determine the appropriate number of hospital beds needed.”

“Part of the solution is to create a cross-province plan to enhance home care and long term care to meet community need. But an important part of the solution also is for Ontario’s government to restore hospital bed capacity with sufficient funding and evidence-based targets to reduce hospital overcrowding across Ontario,” she concluded.

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