

# Ontario Health Coalition

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November 9, 2012

For Immediate Release

Attn: Assignment Editor

## Health Minister's Veiled Threat Likened to Bullying: Health Coalition Livid Over Health Minister's Tactics

The Ontario and Niagara Health Coalitions responded to Ontario Health Minister Deb Matthews's threat to cancel the proposed new hospital for Niagara. According to Matthews, if Niagara municipal leaders criticize her appointee's choice of location for a still-fictional new hospital, the project – which has never been approved anyway – may be cancelled. Legitimate concerns about cuts to and loss of hospital services in local communities has been termed "bickering".

"Let's not forget that the government is proposing to close *five* local hospitals across Niagara," said Natalie Mehra, director of the Ontario Health Coalition. "The Health Minister's appointed hospital supervisor set up the municipal leaders to debate about the location of the fictional new hospital before anyone was even consulted about whether closing five sites was a good idea in the first place (and before the Health Ministry has even approved a new hospital). The process has been deeply problematic."

"Whether or not a new hospital is planned for a community – and its location -- should be a result of a sound planning process, based on community need for health care services, not crass politics," she added.

The coalition likens current Health Minister Deb Matthews' threat to the one made by former Health Minister George Smitherman almost a decade ago. He too threatened that if the community continued to criticize the location of the new St. Catharines' hospital, the project would be cancelled.

But community concerns about the poor location of the new St. Catharines Hospital have been vindicated. The hospital is too far out of the way to be a regional centre and the proximity of the railway has been a problem. As services have been closed in the south of Niagara, the poor location of the St. Catharines' hospital has posed a problem for transportation across the region as well as health service planning.

Despite this, the current Minister of Health is adopting the same bullying tactics.

"This Health Minister is trying to bully the local municipalities into silence," said Sue Hotte, Niagara Health Coalition co chair. "While she is threatening anyone who dares to raise legitimate questions and concerns, her government has not made a single promise to provide any level of hospital services or beds to the communities that would have their local hospitals closed."

"This government has engaged in more and more aggressive tactics to silence opposition and avoid democratic debate about health policy," she added. "They have wiped out democratically elected hospital boards. They have fired hospital CEOs who raise concerns about service cuts. They threaten communities who raise concerns about hospital planning. They wipe out democratic access to information. The institute major policy changes without any democratic debate or discussion, and without going to the Ontario Legislature. The Minister has gone too far. It's time we stood up against such tactics."

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