

Ontario Health Coalition

MEDIA
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE **Attention: Assignment Editors**

Telehealth's opening marks more health privatization warns Ontario Health Coalition

TORONTO - Responding to the Ontario Health Minister's opening of Telehealth Ontario today, the Ontario Health Coalition charged the government with using public money to privatize Ontario's health system. Telehealth Ontario services are being provided by Clinidata Corporation Inc., a private for-profit company. According to the Ministry, Telehealth services will cost Ontarians \$45 million in public money per year for 144 teletriage nurses. This breaks down to a whopping cost of \$300,000 per nurse.

We have to ask ourselves what the profit margin is for Clinidata to provide health services that used to be in the public realm", said Irene Harris, co chair of the Ontario Health Coalition. "Just last week, Mike Harris was seeding the media with statements about so-called runaway health costs. It seems that we all have to tighten our belts - all of us, that is, except for profit-seeking corporations who want a piece of Ontario's health system. Telehealth Ontario is yet another instance of public money spent on profits for private corporations instead of on health care."

Options for organization of triage and telephone support services for Ontarians are numerous: hospitals could use the annual \$45 million to provide such services through their emergency departments; community health centres could be funded to provide services at their centres; a publicly operated central call centre is another option. In all of these alternatives, governance of the program could remain not-for-profit. The Ontario Health Coalition charges that the Ontario government is not giving due consideration to public and non-profit options - and that they are paving the way for profit-seekers to dismantle Medicare.

The ministry is also picking up the full tab for publicity and promotion of Telehealth Ontario. "Clinidata just landed a pretty good deal. They have just won access to the public health market and the people of Ontario end up picking up the tab not only for their profit but also for their public relations", concluded Ms. Harris. **FOR MORE INFORMATION: 416-441-2502**