

Ontario Health Coalition

MEDIA
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Where's it going? Ontario Health Coalition Responds to Budget

Toronto — The Ontario Health Coalition responded to the provincial made-for-television budget released by the Ontario Conservatives today by questioning where the funding for healthcare is going.

"After the deep cuts and damaging restructuring by this government, the re-funding of healthcare shouldn't just increase profits and pay public relations consultants," stated Irene Harris, coalition co chair. "But, given this government's penchant for spending hundreds of millions on advertising, consultants, grants to corporations, profiteering and shutting down hospitals, we demand that they come clean about where this money is going."

The coalition notes that waiting lists are up, hospital beds are down, and access to healthcare continues to be a problem.

"It is odd to boast about spending more money when you deliver less service. How much funding has been spent on government self-promotion, on laying off staff and cutting services? How much is being spent on new profit-taking? How much out-of-pocket spending replaces tax cuts? The story of this budget is the story of a government that leaves behind a tragic legacy of mismanagement and misinformation." concluded Ms. Harris.

A reality check:

- Hospital budgets are increasing, but since 1995, over 5,900 hospital beds have been closed. The costs of closing hospital beds and laying off staff are included in government budgets.

- The Conservative government is funding - for the first time - for-profit corporations to build long term care facilities that the corporations will own and operate on a profit-seeking basis. While government and out-of-pocket spending is on the increase, staffing and care levels are among the lowest in the country and new funding has disappeared into a black hole of unaccountability. Recently, there have even been lay offs in some homes.
- By forcing the privatization of homecare, the Conservative government has created multiple sets of administration — one to oversee the privatization and the granting of contracts -- and multiple administrations in all of the corporations that are now selling homecare for profit. Our estimate is that \$ 1/4 billion could be saved — and redirected to patient care — by eliminating the duplication, advertising, excess administration and profit-taking that the Conservatives have introduced from homecare. The coalition questions how much was spent firing CEOs, replacing community Boards of Directors and wiping out community memberships of homecare governing Community Care Access Centres under the Conservatives sweeping new legislation meant to silence the CCACs' complaints about cutting seniors' home support services.
- The provincial government proudly announced that it has spent the increased federal transfers on healthcare but fails to note the 2000 equipment fund debacle in which federal funding meant for MRIs and CT scanners, among other technology, was spent on grants to for-profit nursing homes and on offsetting previous spending.
- Health Minister Tony Clement has spent millions on unprecedented advertising and PR stunts such as his fill-in-the-bubble questionnaire that asked practically nothing substantive and yielded nothing substantive.
- As of October, a record 900,000 Ontarians have no family doctor, budgets for Community Health Centres have been frozen for over _ decade, primary care reform remains a distant dream, and \$100 million in OHIP services have been delisted. Ontario has the second to lowest patient to physician ratio in Canada.
- Drug costs have increased by a whopping 130 % since 1995/96 and while pharmaceutical corporations top the Fortune 500 list in profits advocating for controls on drug pricing is not on this government's agenda.
- Ontarians now pay the most out-of-pocket for healthcare of anyone in the country — an average of \$ 1,072 per person each year. This wipes out a substantial amount of any "tax cuts" the province has announced.

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