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For Immediate Release

Attn: Assignment Editor

## **Throne Speech: Wynne's Opportunity to Chart Improved Course for Health Care**

With today's Throne Speech, the Wynne government is trying for a fresh start. If this is to succeed, some long-simmering health care issues must be addressed to realign her government's health policies with the values and priorities of Ontarians.

"More than eight years of austerity budgets in Ontario's public community hospitals has left a trail of service cuts, longer travel distances for patients and dangerous overcrowding," said Natalie Mehra, Executive Director of the Ontario Health Coalition. "As a priority, there must be a full moratorium of cuts, and a plan developed to rebuild capacity to meet Ontario's communities' needs -- that means both a fiscal plan that prioritizes people over Bay Street and financial interests, and a hospital capacity plan that moves money to care and restores services in Ontarians' home communities."

Though Ontarians are angry about hospital service cuts, and problems accessing care, on one hand, and exorbitant executive salaries at the very top ranks of public health care institutions, on the other, it is important also to note that we have seen some significant progress in some areas. Health Minister Eric Hoskins has taken on some courageous fights, has re-opened the doors of the Minister's office, has led in the campaign to achieve a public drug plan for all Canadians, has stopped private clinics, has strongly supported public health care in national and international forums, has begun to reform hospital transparency, and has started to move slightly on the hospital cuts. But there are urgent issues remaining, on which Ontarians need to see this government shift course.

### Key Issues:

- Devastating cuts to hospitals across Ontario must stop -- Last spring, the Ontario Health Coalition held a voluntary "referendum" and almost 100,000 people voted to stop the hospital cuts in their towns. In recent months, Health Minister Eric Hoskins has intervened to halt planned cuts in Midland, Wallaceburg, Quinte West and other communities. The Minister's interventions to save vital community hospital services are helpful and most welcome. But, another round of devastating hospital cuts will be coming if the government does not adopt a funding plan to meet population need for care.

Ontario has had eight consecutive years of hospital funding that has failed to meet the rate of inflation let alone population growth and aging pressures. Our province has plummeted to the bottom of the country in the number of hospital beds left in communities, the number of nurses per patient, and has extraordinary rates of hospital overcrowding. The Wynne government must stop the planned closure of hospitals in Niagara, and restore services that have been cut from Ottawa to North Bay, Orillia to Sault Ste. Marie. There must be a moratorium on hospital cuts and a proper plan developed to meet hospital bed and service capacity needs for our province's population.

- Home care reform is crucial to improve access to care and build a public, non-profit home care system -- With the proroguing of the Legislature, the home care reform legislation that was introduced last spring has died. It will be re-introduced this fall, possibly with amendments. Any home care reform needs to actually improve access to care for patients. It must stop the privatization of home care and build a stable and effective home care system.
- Improved access to and care levels in long-term care -- As hospital beds continue to be cut, patients are offloaded quicker and sicker. Yet there is no plan to provide enough access to publicly subsidized long-term care to meet population need. Not only are wait times too long but when people get into long-term care homes they find that care levels are insufficient to meet basic human and health care needs. Ontario needs a plan to meet population need for long-term care and to improve care levels so that each resident gets an average minimum of 4 hours of hands-on nursing and personal support per day -- a level of care that is found by evidence to reduce harm, improve safety and improve health outcomes.

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