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For Immediate Release

Attn: Assignment Editor

Patients, Concerned Citizens and Workers Rally Outside Pre-Budget Hearings to Stop Devastating Hospital Cuts, Privatization

(Toronto, ON) – As MPPs from all three political parties from the Ontario Legislature traveled to Toronto for pre-budget hearings today, they were met with protests by patients, concerned residents and health care workers. The message was clear: stop the devastating cuts to – and privatization of – local hospitals across Ontario. The Ontario Legislature’s Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs has heard from community advocates who have made submissions to budget hearings for almost a decade warning that the cuts are harming patients. But the government is refusing to listen. This year, local health coalitions across Ontario are staging protests outside the hearings to stop the cuts, in partnership with the Ontario Federation of Labour.

“Nine consecutive years of real-dollar cuts have plunged Ontario into the bottom of the country in hospital funding. Patients are being left on stretchers in hallways, surgeries are being cancelled and vital health services are being privatized, subject to user fees, or moved out of town,” said Natalie Mehra, Executive Director of the Ontario Health Coalition. “It is beyond time that these devastating hospital cuts and the privatization of hospital services be stopped. The Ontario government must restore our public hospital funding to at least the average of all the other provinces in Canada.”

This is true of Toronto’s hospitals, a number of which are running at over 100% capacity. Hospitals are thrown into “code gridlock” when all the beds are full. Emergency departments overflow, and patients are left on stretchers in hallways, waiting for beds, sometimes for days. Patients are discharged too frail and end up back in emergency departments. Private clinics, like the Kensington Eye Institute, have sprung up, and these clinics are charging patients out-of-pocket user fees, undermining public Medicare.

“Our hospitals are packed full, they are running beyond full capacity yet more cuts are being anticipated for the upcoming year,” said Carolyn Egan, co-chair of the Toronto Health Coalition. “The patients are the ones that pay the price when staff and services are slashed and ultimately privatized. The current government’s austerity measures are meant to cut costs, with absolutely no regard for patient needs. It is inevitable that the cuts will harm patients and reduce patient care.”

“Here in Toronto, we are seeing the effects of austerity in every community. Hospital cuts, hydro privatization, mounting student debt, precarious jobs and Canada’s lowest social program funding are taking their toll in every neighbourhood,” said Chris Buckley, President of the Ontario Federation of Labour. “Ontarians are calling on the Wynne Government to abandon her austerity agenda and lay out a plan for restoring public services, growing our economy, expanding Ontario’s revenue base and lifting standards for everyone. The next Ontario budget shouldn’t be constrained by government cuts, it should create an Ontario in which everyone prospers.”

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