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For Immediate Release

Attn: Assignment Editor

Ontario Budget Health Care Investments Do Not Meet Expectations: Hospital Funding Inadequate to Stop Cuts & Meet Community's Needs

Toronto – Despite the hype, the Ontario Budget did not provide the relief from a decade of hospital cuts that was hoped. Overall health funding will increase by 3 percent, less than the rest of the public sector. Home and community care funding increases are positive and appear to remain at the same rate as in recent years. Long-term care increases, which were announced last year, remain at 2 percent, as previously announced.

Despite the promise for significant new investment by the Finance Minister, hospital funding will increase by 2-3 percent. To put this number in context, there is consensus among hospital leadership and public health care advocates that a 5 percent increase is required to maintain existing services. Our hospitals have been cut more radically than anywhere in Canada, dropping Ontario to the bottom of the country in the number of hospital beds per person and nursing care per patient. Hopes that hospital funding would at least maintain existing services have not been met and there is no promise for multi-year stable funding increases.

“Ontario’s public hospitals have suffered through real-dollar cuts and global budget freezes for a decade,” reported Natalie Mehra, executive director of the Ontario Health Coalition. “Today’s hospital funding announcement is not enough to turn the corner on the cuts and reinvest in community hospitals, as we had hoped. It will mean that inflationary costs are covered but it will not solve the dangerous levels of overcrowding faced by hospitals across Ontario. Patients will continue to wait on stretchers in hospital hallways as all the beds are full. This level of funding will not even maintain services at existing levels as the population grows and ages. It is our top priority that the government shift course and restore beds and services that have been cut to meet our communities’ needs for care.”

There is some good news in the health budget, including a comprehensive drug coverage program that will expand public insurance for all medically-needed drugs to all Ontarians aged 24 years and under. The Health Coalition applauds the government’s display of national leadership and hopes this program will ultimately be taken up as a national program that covers safe and needed drugs for all Canadians. Also, in good news, there is a funding increase of \$15 million for food in long-term care homes and funding for public psychotherapy.

There are no plans to improve the daily care levels in long term care homes, nor to increase the number of long-term care beds. There have been more than 20,000 people on wait lists for long-term care since the late 1990s and care levels remain stagnant while the acuity of residents (complexity of care needed) continues to rise.

There are also worrying plans for expanding privatization. Ontario’s government is continuing with its privatized P3 program, including new hospitals that were announced today in Windsor and Niagara. In each community with a new hospital is proposed, multiple existing hospitals have been put under threat of closure, in part due to the exorbitant costs of the privatized P3 financing scheme criticized by the Ontario Auditor General for wasting \$8 billion more than if hospitals were built publicly with proper public oversight. In addition, a “voucher” program to move seniors out of hospitals and long-term care homes into cheaper community care settings, will not favour non-profit providers and threatens to expand the for-profit retirement home sector. The Ontario Health Coalition is deeply concerned about the expansion of private for-profit capacity in the community sector.