



May 25, 2018

Attn: Assignment Editor

For Immediate Release

Doug Ford must answer key questions on his “murky” health care plans as numerous Conservative candidates refuse to attend numerous health care all-candidates’ debates

Toronto – With the Ontario election just two weeks away the Ontario Health Coalition -- a public health care advocacy group -- is calling on Conservative Party leader Doug Ford to state clearly his intentions for the province’s health care system. In ridings in Ottawa, London, St. Catharines, Niagara Falls, Oshawa, Muskoka and Windsor Conservative candidates have refused to attend all candidates’ debates on health care organized by the health coalition, nurses, health professionals and community groups. In London last week, Doug Ford made a health care announcement at a private clinic. Mr. Ford has repeatedly stated that he intends to cut more than \$6 billion from public services without being clear from which services this money is going to be cut. The Coalition’s leaders are worried about what these mean for health care in Ontario.

“So far, Doug Ford’s health care proposals are murky at best and contradictory at worst,” noted Ontario Health Coalition executive director Natalie Mehra. “Our key questions about funding for our public hospitals and other health services have not been answered.”

The Coalition has not endorsed any other parties’ plans for health care. They have asked all political parties to meet key commitments to fix the crisis in our hospitals and meet our communities’ needs for care. They note that the Liberal’s plan was laid out in the recent provincial budget and the NDP’s plan is articulated in their platform. Doug Ford alone of all of the major parties’ leaders has not made clear his plans.

In recent weeks, Doug Ford has made a number of scattered statements about health care but has not released a platform or priced out his proposals:

- Most seriously, there is no clear plan for the more than \$6 billion that Mr. Ford plans to cut from public services. To put these numbers in context, a recent \$17 million cut at The Scarborough Hospital alone resulted in a cut to 200 nurses, health professionals and patient support staff; cuts to departments across the hospital; closure of operating rooms; closure of medical and surgical beds even while patients were waiting on stretchers in hallways for beds; closure of outpatient services including the arthritis clinic and dozens of other service cuts. The Coalition has actively advocated that funding must go directly to care and support services for patients but warns Ontarians that there are not billions in administrative cuts to be made. Without question, billions in cuts would be devastating to access to health care for patients.
- Doug Ford has not made any clear commitment to hospital funding. Last week he mused in front of reporters about keeping hospital funding at about the same rate that it is currently. This statement contradicts Mr. Ford’s other claims that he will end hallway medicine and that he will cut billions from public services. Current funding levels in Ontario’s hospitals are the worst in Canada. Hospitals have been plunged into a crisis of overcrowding and long waits for care. A substantial injection of new funding just to meet inflation and population need (5.3% per year) and Ontarians need a clear commitment that funding will go to rebuild care in our community public hospitals not private for-profit clinics.
- Ford has said that he will open long-term care beds to address hospital cuts (as have the NDP and Liberals). But it should be clear that any implication that long-term care will solve the hospital crisis is simply not true; it is a much different level of care. Every health system requires both long-term care and hospital care to work. Ontario needs both long-term care beds and hospital beds to be opened and capacity rebuilt in public and non-profit hospitals and long-term care homes to address wait lists and meet our communities’ needs, and at the same time, care levels in long-term care need to be increased just to meet the current needs of residents.

“The bottom line is this: the numbers just don’t add up,” concluded Ms. Mehra. “We are extremely worried about the billions of dollars in cuts that are being proposed and we are asking Mr. Ford for clarity about exactly what he intends. The discussion has to move to clear and accountable proposals to rebuild public health care and restore our public hospitals and long-term care. We are gravely concerned about plans for unspecified and truly massive cuts and what these would mean for patients and caregivers.”

For more information: Dana Boettger, Communications Manager (416) 441-2502 (office) or Natalie Mehra, Executive Director (416) 230-6402 (cell).

Ontario Health Coalition

The Ontario Health Coalition is a non-partisan public interest group and the largest and broadest on health care in Ontario, representing ½ million people. The OHC represents family and patient groups; the major seniors' groups in Ontario; public interest advocates; careworkers, health professionals, nurses and their unions; doctors who support public medicare; non-profit organizations; equity, cultural and anti-poverty groups; municipalities; local businesses and others. The OHC works to safeguard and improve public health care for all under the principles of equity and compassion that are embodied in the Canada Health Act.