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For Immediate Release

Attn: Assignment Editor

Hamilton's Hospitals Have Passed the Tipping Point: Urgent campaign launched to stop \$27-million in cuts

Hamilton – Hamilton's hospitals are already beyond their tipping point and another massive set of cuts is "reckless and irresponsible", reported advocates today in a press conference. The Ontario Health Coalition joined leaders from the Ontario Council of Hospital Unions/CUPE to warn the public about the newest cuts which amount to \$27 million. In September, they will join other groups to hold a public meeting to launch a campaign to stop them.

Hamilton's hospitals received a 2 per cent increase in this year's budget, which is barely enough to meet inflation. It does not cover population growth, aging and utilization costs (amounting to an additional 3%) leaving the hospitals in a significant shortfall. This comes after an entire decade in which hospital funding has been cut in real dollar terms – the longest period of cuts in Ontario's history.

"It has been exasperating to hear the public relations messaging put out by provincial government authorities. They simply cannot any longer claim that their cuts don't affect patient care," said Rolf Gerstenberger, co chair of the Hamilton Health Coalition. "We hear from patients who have had their surgeries cancelled because there are no beds in which to recover. We hear from people who have waited for days on stretchers in hallways because there are no beds into which to admit them. It is reckless and irresponsible for the provincial government to continue to cut our hospitals."

His concerns were echoed by Dave Murphy, president of CUPE Local 7800 which represents 4,000 staff at HHS: "Staff at Hamilton Health Sciences are struggling to cope with the permanent surge in patients at the hospitals. An aging and growing population is demanding acute care services from a system gutted by years of budget cuts. With bed occupancy rates regularly at or over 100%, it is very clear that the hospitals have been forced to cut badly needed beds and services. The idea of further cutbacks is completely unacceptable."

The evidence is indisputable that cuts have already gone too far. In May, the Chief of Hamilton Paramedic Service reported to Hamilton's emergency and community services committee that multiple ambulances are tied up at the hospitals in unacceptable offload delays of more than 2-hours. Hospital data shows that both hospitals have been operating up to 100- 120% capacity (which means they are full to overflowing) in recent years. The international standard for safe levels of occupancy is 80 – 85%. Ambulance offload delays occur when all hospital beds are full, backing up emergency departments and filling hallways with patients on stretchers because there is nowhere left to admit patients. The data reported to the city's committee showed ambulances taken off the road in hospital offload delays of more than two hours at an average of 14 times per day .

“These cuts are the result of budget choices by the Wynne government, not necessities. The other provinces in Canada fund their hospitals at a higher rate and there is no jurisdiction outside of Ontario that has cut so many hospital beds and services,” reported Natalie Mehra, executive director of the Ontario Health Coalition. “We will be organizing the community into a campaign that cannot be ignored to force the Wynne government to step up and meet its responsibility to fund Hamilton’s hospitals to meet the population’s need for care. These cuts must end now and urgent reinvestments must be made to protect patient and staff safety.”

“All three political parties need to acknowledge that our hospitals require funding at a rate at least equivalent to their real costs, which is 5%. HHS and St. Joseph’s are being funded at 2% and their budgets will be cut again by 3% this year. We expect the Liberal government to increase hospital funding to cover the actual costs and we expect the opposition parties to be strong advocates for that. We have some way to go to achieve this but I am very confident that the Hamilton community strongly supports adequate funding for their hospitals,” says Michael Hurley, president of CUPE’s 30,000 member Ontario Council of Hospital Unions.

The Ontario Health Coalition has been tracking cuts since 2012 alone. It found public reports totalling more than \$185 million in cuts from Hamilton hospitals in the last five years. Newspaper reports show that more than \$100 million was cut in the previous five years also.

Hamilton Health Sciences

2012 –\$15 million in cuts. (Total cuts since 2007 \$104 million.) Source: Hamilton Spectator January 24, 2013.

2013 –\$25 million in cuts. Source: January 24, 2013. These cuts impacted 140 jobs.

2014 -- \$25 million in cuts. Source: MyKawartha.com/Hamilton Spectator October 24, 2014.

2016 -- \$30 million in cuts resulting in the elimination of 97 staff positions. Source: Hamilton Spectator March 4, 2016.

August 2017 -- \$20 million in cuts. Source: Hamilton Spectator July 27, 2017.

Total: at least \$115 million since 2012

St. Joseph’s Health System

2012 – \$7.5 million in cuts. Source: Hamilton Spectator, July 27, 2012.

2013 -- \$10 - \$12 million in cuts. Source: Hamilton Spectator February 7, 2013.

2014 – \$10 million in cuts. Source: Inside Halton/Hamilton Spectator September 4, 2014.

2015 – \$10 million in cuts. Source: Hamilton Spectator, September 4, 2014.

2016 -- \$26 million shortfall resulted in cuts to 136 positions. Source: CBC News Feb. 1 2016/December 4, 2015.

August 2017 -- \$7 million in cuts. Source: Hamilton Spectator July 27, 2017.

Total: at least \$70.5 million since 2012

For more information please contact: Ontario Health Coalition (416) 441-2502.