

Ontario Health Coalition

15 Gervais Drive, Suite 305, Toronto, Ontario M3C 1Y8

tel: 416-441-2502 email: ohc@sympatico.ca www.ontariohealthcoalition.ca

June 13, 2012

For Immediate Release

Attn: Assignment Editor

McGuinty Reneging on Years of Progress in Long-Term Care Homes' Inspections & Enforcement: Betrays Longstanding Promises to Ontario Seniors

Toronto – Remember Health Minister George Smitherman's tearful promise that there would be a "revolution" in long-term care? That promise, made after horrific exposés of neglect and inadequate care levels, is now being abandoned.

In fact, a decade of media interest and public activism won the instatement of annual inspections in long-term care homes by Ontario's government in the early 2000s. Now, the McGuinty government is reversing its promise.

The Ontario Health Coalition expressed its deep frustration at today's reports quoting Health Minister Deb Matthews who said that Ontario's long-term care homes will *not* be subject to annual inspections; a reversal of long-standing promises by her government. The Minister's comments were made yesterday in response to the revelation by the Ontario Public Service Employees Union that long-term care inspectors are overwhelmed, and inspections may be delayed more than five years.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, a number of high-profile exposés of poor conditions in nursing homes were released in the Toronto Sun, the Ottawa Citizen, the Toronto Star and CBC, among others. As a result, inadequate care, neglect, violence, and infrequency of inspections of long-term care homes became major public policy issues.

Accordingly, the Public Accounts Committee of the Legislature required the Ministry of Health to begin to collect and report on hours of care in each home. In 2001, the Eves government instituted annual inspections for the homes. When the McGuinty government took office, it re-established a regime of surprise annual inspections and restored the requirement that an RN be on site 24/7 at each home.

In recent years, all of these improvements have been eroded. A promised minimum care standard has been abandoned. Public access to information is poor. The Ministry of Health has shut out public interest groups that do not agree with its refusal to re-establish minimum care standards and regulations.

"The promise to re-establish surprise annual inspections in this province's nursing homes was won after horrible deaths and inadequate care were exposed to the public," noted Natalie Mehra, director of the Ontario Health Coalition. "That promise goes back more than a decade, to the 1990s. We are appalled to hear that Minister Deb Matthews is abrogating that promise now."

"We are deeply concerned that the McGuinty government's promise for a "revolution" in long-term care to prevent further deaths and neglect is being broken," she concluded. "We fear that the nursing home industry, which now owns the majority of Ontario's nursing homes, has undue influence on the Ministry of Health where it lobbies for ever more funding with ever fewer strings. That the McGuinty government is weakening the regulatory and enforcement environment for long-term care homes is not in the public interest. It is a betrayal of long-standing promises to Ontario's seniors and their families."

For more information: Natalie Mehra 416-441-2502 (office)