

Ontario Health Coalition

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Attn: Assignment Editor

Ontario Government Seniors' Strategy Attacks Universality for Seniors' Health Care; Thin on Improvements to Access

Toronto – The Ontario Health Coalition, representing more than 400 organizations dedicated to protecting public health care, warns that the Ontario government's proposed Seniors' Strategy threatens the core principle of universal health care for all.

"Universality is a core principle for health care. As more and more services are moved out of hospital it is imperative that Ontarians insist that the Ontario government not abandon this principle in home and community care," said Natalie Mehra, director of the Ontario Health Coalition. "The proposal to create a means-tested home care system explicitly threatens privatization rather than upholding the equity principles of the Canada Health Act when it comes to home and community care services for the elderly."

"We are strongly opposed to this approach," added Derrell Dular, managing director of the Older Canadians Network and board member of the Ontario Health Coalition. "We have a means-tested system for funding care. It is called the tax system. Our tax system should be used so that health care is funded in a progressive way according to our ability to pay and corporations should pay their fair share. The burden of care should not put on the sickest individuals when they are elderly or dying. Such an approach is dangerous and violates core values of Ontarians."

Though there are a number of positive proposals, the Seniors' Strategy proposals released yesterday by the Minister of Health misses key opportunities to set clear goals to improve access to care, including:

- The summary and recommendations released to date fail to recognize that many Ontarians already have insufficient home care, or in the worst cases, no access at all. There is no proposal to improve existing access to home care beyond already-announced funding. Ontarians currently do not have a clear right to access home care services and many patients continue to be offloaded from hospitals without adequate care in place due to funding shortfalls and staffing shortages. In recent months a number of Community Care Access Centres (government agencies responsible for the funding and provision of home care) have reported that they are wait-listing even high needs clients. Care is severely rationed leaving seniors with no option but to pay out-of-pocket or go without. According to the 2010 Provincial Auditor's report, more than 10,000 Ontarians are on wait lists for home care. The Auditor further found that home care services are inequitable across Ontario and wait lists are inconsistently tracked, a situation that continues today.
- More than 20,000 Ontarians are waiting for placement in a long-term care home, according to Ministry of Health data, and Health Quality Ontario reports that wait times have quadrupled since 2005. Wait lists numbering 20,000 or more have persisted since the late 1990s. The summary and recommendations release yesterday do not address the long wait lists for Ontarians who have already been assessed as needing long-term care home placement.
- The report fails to address longstanding problems such as: Ontario's poorly organized home care which is run through an expensive competitive bidding system rife with duplication and privatization; inadequate care levels in long-term care homes; the shortage of acute care and complex continuing care beds for seniors in hospitals; and, the ongoing cuts to and privatization of outpatient hospital services such as physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech pathology and chiropody required by the elderly.

The coalition is producing an analysis of the Ministry's Seniors' Strategy recommendations that will be available on our website at www.ontariohealthcoalition.ca

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