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For Immediate Release

Attn: Assignment Editor

More than 94,000 Ontarians Join in Grassroots Referendum to Stop Devastating Hospital Cuts

Massive Piles of Votes delivered to Opposition Party Leaders Outside Ontario Legislature

Toronto – From across Ontario representatives from dozens of communities facing devastating cuts to their community hospitals carted thousands of ballots to the Ontario Legislature. The votes – 93,840 of them as of last night – were cast in a province-wide voluntary “referendum” on Saturday May 28 and in lead-in advance polls held in the last two weeks. Since last night the coalition has received hundreds more votes, putting the total over 94,000. Hundreds of votes continue to be sent in to the coalition every few hours. To put the size of the vote in perspective, a very large petition presented to the Legislature might have 20,000 signatures at most.

More than 40 communities took part in the referendum and more than 1,000 volunteers took to the streets on the weekend to staff voting stations outside grocery stores, corner stores, busy retailers, in Legions and churches and other high-traffic areas. In total, there were more than 1,000 voting stations, including advanced polls. Health Coalition volunteers collected oaths from those voting, asking people to swear that they are 16-years or older, the age of consent for health-care decisions, and that they would only vote once. People were asked to leave their postal code to help ensure the integrity of the vote wherever possible.

In more than 40 communities, volunteers set up voting stations and collected votes as part of the grassroots referendum, including: Thunder Bay, Sault Ste. Marie, St. Joseph Island, Timmins, Kapuskasing, North Bay, South River, Ottawa, Smiths Falls, Brockville, Kingston, Quinte West, Northumberland, Durham, Kawartha Lakes, Peterborough, Toronto, Hamilton, Niagara, Guelph, Orillia, Midland, Penetanguishene, Oxford County, London, St. Marys, Stratford, Seaforth, Chatham, Wallaceburg, Sarnia, Essex County, Windsor, and others.

Ontarians were asked to vote yes or no as to whether Ontario’s government should stop the cuts to community hospitals and restore services to meet the population need for care. More than 99.6% voted in favour of stopping the cuts. Everywhere, people expressed their gratitude to volunteers for holding the referendum and for doing something to stop the cuts in their communities.

The results as of last night (note: every few hours we are receiving hundreds more votes):

“Yes” or “No”: Ontario’s government must stop the cuts to our community hospitals and restore services, funding and staff to meet our communities’ needs for care.

Yes –	93,501
No –	308
Spoiled –	31
<u>Total –</u>	<u>93,840</u>

The coalition is calling for Ontario’s government to restore public hospital funding to the average of the other provinces. By every reasonable measure, Ontario’s hospital funding is at or near the very bottom of all the provinces in Canada. The coalition is also calling for public hospital funding to go to care and vital support services.



“The huge turnout is representative of deeply-held values that cross all political line and all regions in our province,” reported Natalie Mehra, executive director. “The message we received was overwhelming. People are angry about their communities’ hospital cuts. In no uncertain terms, they want the services restored and they want to ensure that funding is adequate and it goes to care and support services, not executive tiers and consultants. They were happy to be able to vote on it.”

She concluded: “We were certain before, but having gone through this massive undertaking and having spoken with more than a hundred thousand Ontarians, we can say with more certainty than ever that our current provincial government fails to listen to the will of Ontarians at their peril. Ontarians urgently want to find a way to have their voices heard, to stop the cuts and bring back the services that they are losing in their local public hospitals.”

The coalition is asking the public for donations to help cover the costs of the volunteer-led referendum.

Background

Ontario’s hospital cuts are the deepest in the country, and despite claims by government, the services that are being dismantled in local public hospitals are not replaced in community care. In fact, many communities are losing vital services and across the province whole categories of services are being privatized. Without any sound capacity planning, hospital redevelopment decisions seem to be driven by political opportunism and divorced from service needs. Tens of millions are wasted in renovations and redevelopments, only to find services closing down within a few years. Planning, such as it is, bears no relation to community need anymore.

The cuts are devastating. Entire community hospitals are on the line. Services like birthing; emergency departments; medical and surgical beds; mental health units; chronic care beds; surgeries and diagnostic tests; and thousands of nurses, health professionals, caregivers, and vital patient support workers and all the work they do --- all of these are threatened with cuts in different communities. In many communities hospitals are running at dangerous levels of overcrowding.

By every reasonable measure, Ontario has now dropped to the bottom of the country in hospital services. We have the fewest hospital beds left – by far – of any province. Only Chile and Mexico in the entire developed world have fewer hospital beds than does Ontario. We have the least amount of nursing care per patient (both RN and RPN combined). Patients are moved out of hospital earlier in Ontario than any other province – and we have the highest readmission rates as people end up back in emergency departments. Charts showing government data on these measures and others can be found here: <http://www.ontariohealthcoalition.ca/index.php/health-system-facts-trends/funding/>

Every service that is being cut is privatized, moved out of town or lost entirely. Patients are now required to drive longer and longer distances for care, or are being charged hundreds or even thousands of dollars in private clinics for cataract surgeries, colonoscopies and other care than used to be provided – under OHIP – in our local public hospitals. People are waiting on stretchers, in the worst cases for days, for admission to hospitals that are filled to overcapacity.