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Attn: Assignment Editor

For Immediate Release

Coalition Applauds Wynne Government for Reversing Course on Seniors' Drug Fee Increase

Toronto -- This week, Ontario's government announced that it is canceling its plans to dramatically increase user fees for seniors' drugs after more than 80 organizations signed onto a letter to the Premier asking her to revisit the idea. The government's plan, announced in the 2016 Ontario Budget in February, would have increased the deductible for seniors' drugs from \$100 to \$170 – a 70 per cent increase -- and co-payments would have risen to \$7.11 per prescription. Under this plan, seniors with incomes of more than \$19,300 for a single person or \$32,300 for a couple would have faced these increases. In late March, the Ontario Health Coalition and the Older Canadians Network wrote an open letter to the Premier asking her to revisit the decision pointing out that it would not only cause hardship for seniors that can hardly be described as high income but it also compromised the core tenets of public health care. More than 80 organizations, from seniors' groups to doctors, nurses and unions, signed onto the letter.

The Ontario Health Coalition and the Older Canadians Network applaud the government for listening to our concerns and thank all the organizations and individuals that joined the open letter and contacted the government to help win the reversal. As we outlined to the Premier, needed health care must be funded equitably through a progressive tax system in which everyone, including the wealthy and corporations, pay their fair share, not through user fees when people are aging, or when they are sick and dying.

While the Ontario government has agreed to stop the plans for a user fee increase for drugs, it continues to download costs through increased user fees for other needed health care services that are being cut. Today, we want to remind the Ontario government of the principles at stake, in the words of the open letter we sent to the Premier:

"As Ontario pays down its deficit, the fundamental values that underlie our public health care programs should not be abandoned. Universal publicly-funded health care is understood as a fundamental value in Canada. The idea that the wealthy and the poor share the same health services and therefore have a common interest in its quality and success, is cornerstone to our health system...."

Public health care is about taking care of one another. We pay through our taxes for care when we are of working age and healthy –and we share the cost across society – so that the burden for care is not shouldered by the sick, the elderly and the dying. This is a point of pride for most of us.

Already seniors face mounting out-of-pocket costs for long-term care, respite and medical supplies. As local hospital services are closed in more and more towns, seniors face significant new costs for rehabilitation, lab tests, and travel costs. Unofficially, home care is already subject to means-testing, forcing families to shoulder ever more of the expense. When one adds to these existing user costs to the planned higher deductibles and co-payments for drugs, the burden for middle income seniors is becoming unbearable.

In fact, Premier, as you know, across Canada, the progressive public interest organizations that work on health care are advocating for the principles of the Canada Health Act not only to be safeguarded in hospitals and clinics, but also extended to cover home care and drugs in a bid to protect equity and reduce suffering as health care is reformed. It is distressing to see the Ontario government moving in the opposite direction."

For full text of the open letter and a list of groups that signed on please go to:

<http://www.ontariohealthcoalition.ca/?p=4128>

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