

Ontario Health Coalition

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Attn: Assignment Editor

CODE RED: One in Four Ontario Hospitals Facing Significant Cuts or Closure Coalition Warns that Hospital Cuts Have Reached Crisis Levels

(Toronto) In a new report, “Code Red: Ontario’s Hospital Cuts Crisis” the Ontario Health Coalition warns that Ontario’s hospitals are living in a permanent state of crisis, having been pushed by years of cuts into levels of overcrowding that are dangerous for patients and staff.

With the report, the Coalition released an interactive map of Ontario showing 51 hospital sites out of just over 200 hospital sites across the province that are marked as “Code Red” denoting significant hospital cuts or threat of closure. This means that at least one in four of Ontario hospitals is experiencing significant cuts or closure.

Ontario is in its eighth year of real-dollar cuts to hospital global budgets. For the last three years, hospital global budgets have been frozen at 0% increases, which is in real-dollar terms a significant cut. After decades of downsizing, the cuts are biting ever more deeply into vital patient care services. The coalition is calling on the government to stop the cuts.

Key findings:

- Many hospitals in larger communities are operating at 100% capacity or more – meaning all the beds are full and patients are lined up in stretchers in hallways. This puts hospitals into what is called “code gridlock” and staff are forced to discharge patients ever “quicker and sicker” to free up beds.
- Internationally, the accepted evidence shows that a safe level of hospital occupancy is between 80% and 85%. Anything higher than this leads to higher rates of potentially fatal hospital-acquired infections, bed crises, backlogged and overcrowded emergency departments, patients lined in stretchers in hallways, inadequate clinical staff for patient load, long waits, ambulance offload delays and a host of other problems. These problems are frequently seen in Ontario’s larger towns.
- Small and rural hospitals have faced disproportionate cuts and a number are at risk of total closure, despite overwhelming community opposition and dangers to patients.
- Excuses such as “transforming health care”, “moving care to the community”, and blaming the bed shortage on Alternate Level of Care patients are simply cover for real hospital cuts to services that are not being – and cannot be transferred -- to public health care services in the community. Too often, these are just cover for privatization of needed health care.
- As small and rural hospitals experience devastating losses of service, patients find that the regional hospitals in larger towns have no capacity to take them either, as they too are being cut.
- Ontario funds its hospitals at the lowest rate per capita of any province in Canada.
- Ontario has the fewest hospital beds left of any province in Canada and is near the bottom of the entire OECD in the number of hospital beds per population.
- The true measure of affordability – hospital funding as a proportion of our provincial GDP – Ontario ranks nearly at the bottom of the country. We are 8th of 10 provinces.

The interactive map and full report are available at: www.ontariohealthcoalition.ca

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