

Ontario Health Coalition

Campaign to Stop Doug Ford's Privatization of our Hospitals and Vital Health Care Services

As at October 20, 2022

Advocates for public health care face a truly unprecedented all-out effort to privatize health care across the spectrum: home care, long-term care, hospitals, virtual care, primary care, public health, EMS and more.

Our analysis of the Ford government's intent is that they are very serious.

- The Ford government has spent several years putting in place the legislative framework to privatize home care and the next generation of long-term care and to have the Minister be able to privatize any part of health care.*
- They dismantled the LHINs and handed health care over to the provider companies to govern, without any public governance. Included among these provider companies are the for-profit long-term and home care companies.*
- They refused to admit to the staffing and capacity crisis in our public hospitals despite the unprecedented closures of dozens emergency and ICU services across the province.*
- They passed Bill 7 to force the elderly and persons with disabilities out of hospitals and override their right to informed consent rather than take measures to restore lost staff, beds, operating room and other capacity.*
- They have been absolutely intransigent on Bill 124, refusing to withdraw it even in the face of the worst staffing crisis we have ever seen and even as billions in the COVID fund have not been spent.*
- They have opted to privatize long-term care even though it is taking far longer, rather than open more fast-track public long-term care facilities. They have missed their initial staffing targets in long-term care and have not replaced them.*
- They are entirely ignoring the crisis in home care.*
- They made public their plans to privatize our public hospital surgeries and diagnostics in the dead of summer, right after the election, timed to ensure the least public scrutiny possible and the longest time possible to ride out any loss of popularity before the next election.*

They couldn't have driven the public system into the ground more effectively than if they had planned to do so.

The business model of private hospitals and clinics is to maximize their profits by billing OHIP and billing patients on top.

- We have called every private clinic in Ontario four times and every private clinic across Canada twice. Each time we caught the majority of for-profit clinics extra-billing patients for medically necessary services in violation of the Canada Health Act and/or charging them for an array of medically unnecessary add-ons.*
- A number of the for-profit clinics also double-bill, charging patients and OHIP or the provincial equivalent in other provinces for the same services.*
- The for-profit clinics have taken the B.C. government to court to bring down the laws that protect single-tier public medicare and stop extra billing. They have lost at every level of the courts in B.C. We expect them to challenge to the Supreme Court of Canada.*

Without question, if we do not stop these privatization plans we will lose the ownership and control of our public health care services and we will also lose single-tier public health care.

Our goal is to stay as focused as possible and do the absolute most we can to stop privatization and win public interest solutions to the problems, including most urgently the staffing crisis.

Background: Privatization of our Public Hospitals

Across Ontario communities have spent a hundred years or more building their local public hospitals and their services. People have donated, given in local taxes, donated through payroll deductions, volunteered, and literally built their local public hospitals. Ford's plan would dismantle this, taking the profitable services – the parts that for-profit corporations want to privatize – out of our local public hospitals.

The overwhelming majority of Ontario's hospital services are public and non-profit. We have not lost the ownership of our public hospitals yet and we need to make a priority of stopping the privatization of them. In very concrete terms what the Ford government is trying to do is to take the profitable parts of the hospitals – starting with the surgeries, MRIs and CAT Scans and hand them over to private for-profit corporations. It is the *dismantling* of our local public hospitals.

Privatizing our public hospitals and failing to address the staffing crisis in them are twin issues. The provincial government has *chosen* to underfund (actually engaging in real dollar cuts leading into the pandemic) and downsize our public hospitals beyond all reason and evidence. Across Ontario there are operating rooms that are closed for weeks or months at a time, or even permanently, due to purposeful underfunding and downsizing. Ontario now has the fewest hospital beds left of any province in Canada and funds our hospitals at the lowest rate in the country.

During the pandemic, the Ford government has repeatedly chosen to underspend its health care budget as well as its COVID emergency budget. They are purposefully understating revenues and overstating expenditures. In fact, the most recent data shows that they exaggerated the deficit by a \$15 billion difference. Ontario now has a \$2.1 surplus, while in the financial year ending March 31, they had underspent their health care projections by \$1.8 billion even while the staffing crisis across health care has so imperilled services that there were more than 80 emergency department and ICU closures over the summer, long-term care homes can't take residents and can't provide needed care for those in the homes, and home care can't serve almost half of the patients referred to them.

The staffing crisis has now superseded underfunding as the issue that is causing public hospitals to close departments and services. Despite this the Ford government has refused to do anything substantive about the staffing crisis in the hospitals. It won't even repeal Bill 124. It won't control the price gouging by private staffing agencies, nor take any measures to stop them. They have made a lot of noise about fast-tracking credentials for international staff but the numbers are very small. They have done nothing to recruit back staff who have retired or left from burnout, lack of safety, workload and Bill 124 issues. Instead, they have dramatically increased funding for private for-profit clinics.

They are running the public hospital system into the ground and using the crisis - that they have had a significant hand in creating – to now hand over our vital hospital services to private profit seeking corporations. Canadians recoiled in horror when it was finally exposed to everyone what the for-profit industry has done to our nursing homes. We cannot let them do the same thing to our hospitals.

This is a political *choice* not a necessity. Funding our public hospitals to open their closed ORs and run their MRIs and CTs at full capacity will address the wait lists. No matter what, a massive provincial government-led campaign must happen to recruit back staff who have left and remove barriers to them coming back, and launch immediate fast-track in-depth training to get new staff in. In order to retain them workload and safety issues must be addressed. Agency staffing must be banned. Bill 124 must be repealed.

The Campaign Plan

Overall Goals:

We need to show Ontarians that the Ford government is making a political *choice* not to support our public hospitals and to direct funding to private for-profit corporations to privatize our public hospital services instead.

We need to set out clear demands to resource our public hospitals to re-open closed beds, operating rooms and services, address the staffing crisis and expand our public hospital capacity to provide for our communities' needs for services.

We will develop resources to share widely, set up a plan to overwhelm Ford's messaging, then roll out a tour of town hall meetings that leads to a local action plan and several large central actions. Our members and partners will roll out their own communications, actions and events in tandem, coordinated with the Health Coalition. All of these will build towards potential job action and/or a mass referendum to stop the privatization of our public health care.

1. Overwhelm the Ford Government's Messaging

The Ontario Health Coalition will do the following:

- Create a series of very short videos for social media with the key messages and arguments, boost them significantly, ask partner and affiliated organizations to do the same, using the message box.
- Create a series of internet shareables with the key messages and arguments, boost them significantly, ask partner and affiliated organizations to do the same, using the message box.
- Create an echo chamber of leaders and experts who will write articles and speak at every opportunity to stop this privatization. Do a major province-wide media tour with those experts and leaders who will speak out against this privatization and call on Ontarians to take action and join in the fightback.
- Coordinate repeated press conferences by our member, partner and affiliated organizations to issue reports, statements, open letters, videos and the like.
- OHC press conference, possibly in partnership with Democracy Watch and others to kick off the campaign. Focus on the fact that the Ford government lied about his privatization plans for our public hospitals.
- Expand to other types of social media: podcasts, tiktok, Instagram etc.
- Power map communities to identify allies and champions.

Request for our allied, affiliated, partner and member organizations to assist in the following:

- Use and amplify the key messages in every possible way. Either use the OHC very short videos and internet shareables for social media with the key messages and arguments as is and boost them significantly on all social media and communications platforms.
 - Or edit them to put in your own logo and send them out in your own name. Boost them significantly on all social media platforms.
 - Or use them to create your own.
 - Let us know if you are creating videos and internet shareables and when you are releasing them so we can coordinate among all our allies to amplify them.
- Do you have a spokesperson who is willing to join an echo chamber of leaders and experts who will do radio and TV talk show tours, interviews, write op eds and speak at every opportunity to stop this privatization. The OHC will organize a major province-wide media tour with those experts and leaders who will speak out against this privatization and call on Ontarians to take action and join in the fightback.
- Power map communities to identify allies and champions.

2. Tour of Virtual Town Hall Meetings to Roll Out Local Action Plans

The Ontario Health Coalition will do the following:

- Hold a “tour” of town hall meetings, particularly in small and rural communities and the north where emergency departments and ICUs have been closing. Deliver the key messages about Ford’s failure to rebuild capacity in our local public hospitals, and instead are dismantling them through privatization. Private clinics only locate in large urban centres. Each town hall meeting should include an action plan, sign up people to join the campaign, have a set of broadening community education.
- Hold a tour of public forums/town hall meetings in larger urban centres to do the same, but with a focus on the fact that they have operating rooms, MRIs and the like in their local hospitals that are not operating at full capacity or have been closed down due to underfunding and now the Ford government is rebuilding that capacity but in for-profit clinics/hospitals, risking public medicare, and not supporting the local public hospitals. Again, these would lead to broadening public education campaign and mobilization.

Request for our allied, affiliated, partner and member organizations to assist in the following:

- Identify towns on the list for the tour in which you want to help lead and organize.
- Provide a leader to speak at some of the tour locations.
- Contact each member in your identified target communities to tell them the urgency of the Ford government’s attempt to privatize our public hospitals, dismantling our local public hospitals and leaving them in chaos – ask them to come to the town hall meeting about your specific local public hospitals – to save their services – and to spread the word.
- Commit to boosting identified target events on Facebook, with geographic targeting.
- Help with province-wide publicity of events.

Out of the town hall meetings we will roll out a local action plan that feeds into the central action plan.

The OHC will:

- Create the materials and structure for a Million Medicare Defenders.
The idea is to get a million people to sign on to be whistleblowers about health care privatization and to safeguard our public health care.
We will ask the people signing on to do specific things:
 - Share a leaflet in their workplace, door-to-door in their neighbourhood, in community groups etc.
 - Join in the local rallies, protests and provincial events.
 - Contact us to send in stories of people being charged for services in private clinics.
- We will also organize a survey to collect stories of people being charged for services – do surveys in workplaces through organizations and unions, collect them in every public forum etc. and generate a formal complaint to the federal government and possibly a Writ of Mandamus. Force the federal government to take on the Ford government for violating the Canada Health Act in the most public way possible.

Request for our allied, affiliated, partner and member organizations to assist in the following:

- Help sign up a Million Medicare Defenders.
- Do the surveys with your retirees/seniors/others.

3. Mobilizing Actions/Events

The OHC will consult on these and decide on plans/timelines. Please send your feedback. Possible actions that we can plan to mobilize Ontarians and create visible resistance to the privatization of our hospitals:

- Hold marches on bridges over major highways with health care workers and community members supporting for very visible mobilization.
- Mobilize rural communities to hold actions with farm vehicles/tractors.
- Joint health care worker protests outside of hospitals, including tabling to give info to patients and families:
 - Can EMS, fire, other do drive-bys with support?
 - Can we build in community solidarity to support?
 - Hold other community support actions – for eg. Medicare Mondays or Wake Up Wednesdays (akin to the House is on Fire Fridays for climate change).
- Boycott the privatizers.
 - Look at Loblaws/Shoppers/Maple.
 - Boycott private clinics and labs.

4. Other potential plans

- Like our giant teddy bear tour (a 12-foot bear which we headlined: We Can't "Bear" to Lose Public Medicare) and the Trojan horse tour (a 15-foot Trojan Horse created by OCHU – the Trojan Horse of hospital privatization), create a prop and hold a giant prop tour of media events that generates a photo or TV coverage giving the warning and arguments against for-profit privatization of our hospitals. Ideas include a giant Pandora's Box or a giant umbrella.
- We need to push all of the political parties for clear and firm commitments on this.
 - Resolutions for riding associations