



**For Immediate Release  
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**Attn: Assignment Desk**

## **More than 10,000 Protest to tell Ford Government to stop health privatization, cuts**

Toronto – They came from across Ontario in the middle of a work day by the thousands with a message for the Doug Ford government. From a stage in front of the Ontario Legislature Natalie Mehra, executive director of the Ontario Health Coalition called on the crowd of more than 10,000 to make enough noise that it would be heard by legislators inside the building, “Doug Ford's government has no mandate to impose cuts and privatization of public health care. Not a word of this was breathed in the election,” she said. “Health care belongs to the people of Ontario, we fund it, and we have worked in our communities for a century to build our public hospitals and local health services. Mr. Ford, we are demanding that you improve it as you promised, no to cuts, privatization and mega-mergers. If you try to close down or privatize our local health care services, we will fight these in every community, every step of the way.”

Patients spoke out about concerns over mega-mergers and health restructuring. Mr. Ford has used his majority to push through a new law giving the government and their appointees in the new Super Agency extraordinary powers to restructure, cut, transfer, close and privatize health services.

Cancer care patient Paul Kahnert told the crowd that previous cuts to colonoscopy screening tests meant that his colon cancer remission was not caught quickly enough. He said, “I had to have chemo, and developed complications that have changed my life forever. It's been a lot of loss. But my experience is two stories...On one hand I came as close as a person can to dying because of health care cuts that were made to fund corporate tax cuts, just like Doug Ford is planning. On the other hand, the care I got in Ontario's cancer care system was amazing. It is no exaggeration to say that the Ford government's cuts and privatization plans will risk lives if not stopped.”

Lyyli MacDonald is an organ donation recipient who had a lung transplant: “The Trillium organ donation program saved my life, it is a model for the world and doctors from Europe and Asia come here to learn how we do it,” she said. “Doug Ford's cuts and mergers and privatization are a huge threat to patients like me. We need improvements to our health care, not the destruction of our social safety net.”

They were joined by Shalon Armstrong, a chronic pain patient who is fearful about leaked plans to cut almost half-a-billion in OHIP services, potentially including chronic pain shots: “If Doug Ford wants to increase emergency visits, worsen the mental health crisis, this is how to do it,” she warned.

NDP leader and leader of the Official Opposition, Andrea Horwath spoke at the rally, committing to, “Stand up for our public in government and outside.”

She was followed by John Fraser, Leader of the Liberal Party who warned about the Ford government's plans for “Corporatization of our public health care” and pledged to stand up against it.

Green Party Leader Mike Schreiner thanked the crowd for all their work to protect public health care. He said, “The majority of Ontarians did not vote for this and do not support it,” calling on Mr. Ford to stop privatization and cuts.

Leaders of Ontario's unions, including CUPE, Unifor, OPSEU, ONA, the Ontario Federation of Labour and the Canadian Labour Congress were featured as speakers, with thousands of their members who work as nurses, health professionals, PSWs and support staff cheered. They were joined on stage by UFCW, COPE, OSSTF, USW, ETFO and SEIU Healthcare and together they pledged to build a fightback and work with community organizations to protect and expand public health care, not privatize and cut it.

Physician Dr. Ritika Goel and dozens of paramedics spoke of their fears about the impact of cuts, restructuring and privatization on patient care.

Local community members who have formed citizen's committees to save their local hospital services following the last round of restructuring told the crowd that they now face a far bigger threat, with massive scale restructuring planned. They vowed to stop any new attempts to cut and close their services.

The crowd from every part of Ontario left having sent a clear message to the Ford government: this is just the beginning, Coalition leaders said, committing to fighting in every town across Ontario to protect our services and insist that the Ford government live up to the election promises.