



For Immediate Release
Attn: Assignment Editor

April 17, 2019

Ford's ambulance and public health cuts and restructuring come with high costs, reduced services: Coalition warns

Toronto – It has been done before and it resulted in enormous costs, not savings, and it compromised services. This was the message of the Ontario Health Coalition in reaction to the growing array of health care services that the Doug Ford government plans to restructure and cut. The Coalition released their tally of Doug Ford's health care cuts to date:

- Cut OHIP+ so families with sick children will have to seek private coverage first and pay deductibles and co-payments.
- Cut planned mental health funding by more than \$330 million.
- Cancelled all new planned overdose prevention sites.
- Cut funding for the dementia strategy.
- Let surge funding run out for hospital overcrowding. Surge beds are now closed without replacement, despite overcrowding crisis.
- Cut and restructured autism funding.
- 2019 Budget set overall health funding at less than the rate of inflation and population growth, let alone aging. This means service levels cannot keep up with population need.
- 2019 Budget set public hospital funding at less than the rate of inflation. This means real dollar (inflation adjusted dollar) cuts and serious service cuts.
- 2019 Budget – cut provincial funding for public health by almost 1/3 (27%) and cut public health units from 35 to 10.
- Introduced Bill 74 which gives sweeping new powers to the Minister and Super Agency to force restructuring of the entire health system.
- Municipalities revealed Ford government plan to cut and restructure ambulance services, down from 59 to 10.

Ambulance cuts/restructuring

“The current EMS system in Ontario was created by Mike Harris’ restructuring,” noted Natalie Mehra, executive director of the Ontario Health Coalition. “The evidence from that round of restructuring is that costs grew dramatically post-restructuring.”

The Coalition is concerned that already there are problems of slower response times in rural areas due to long travel distances, and inadequate numbers of ambulances available in urban centres due to crisis-level hospital overcrowding and paramedics stuck in long offload delays. The Ford government’s restructuring plan does not address any of the causes of too long EMS response time, it does not ameliorate services even where there is evidence of significant need.

“Cutting and centralizing the ambulance services down to ten giant regions means that smaller rural and northern communities will be lesser priorities and risks their service levels,” she warned.

Public Health cuts/restructuring

“Severe cuts amounting to almost one-third of provincial funding for public health threaten vital local services including food and water safety, infectious disease tracking and prevention, immunizations, prenatal training and safety, overdose prevention, safe needle and biohazard programs and many others. The Ford government has not explained how these services are supposed to be provided at one-third less cost,” said Ms. Mehra.

Overall restructuring/cuts

The Ford government is now clearly embarking on the most aggressive and radical health care restructuring that Ontario has ever seen, warns the Ontario Health Coalition. The Mike Harris government hospital restructuring cost \$3.9 billion, according to the Provincial Auditor General, to cut \$800 million from public hospitals. It led to for-profit privatization and new user fees for an array of services. The costs were never recovered and many of the current problems that we face in health care can be traced back to the last two rounds of restructuring.

“Restructuring itself has proven to be enormously costly, taking billions of public dollars away from services to lay off health care staff, move buildings, rename services, create new boards, renovate buildings and so on,” concluded Ms. Mehra. “Mr. Ford has taken what Mike Harris did and is now doing it again on a more radical, more massive scale. But the public is livid about the consequences of the last two rounds of restructuring. Ford seems to be oblivious to the fact that the last restructuring siphoned billions of dollars away from patient care and led to a gutting of services, particularly in medium and smaller communities across Ontario, but also impacting cities negatively.”

“Mr. Ford has no mandate for any of this. Not one of the cuts and none of his plans for massive restructuring, mega-mergers, service closures and transfers was ever mentioned in the election. The public has never been consulted,” said Ms. Mehra. “Instead the government is now covering up by holding invitation-only “engagement” sessions with government-funded managers who cannot speak freely. In any case these are tightly controlled sessions, not real consultations by any normal criteria. The truth is that the plan to cut, restructure and privatize health care has been hatched in secret with a set of advisors and insiders, a number of whom have private interests, and many of whom have been wrong before and bear significant responsibility for many of the problems we now face. We are planning mass protests and escalating actions in response and we demand that Mr. Ford stop his high-handed undemocratic destruction of services and removal of local control over health care services that our communities have spent more than 100 years building.”

The Coalition has called a mass rally at Queens Park outside the Main Legislative Building on Tuesday, April 30 at noon.