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**For Immediate Release**

**Attn: Assignment Editor**

## **Cross-Province Protest Decries Ford's Inadequate Response to Long-Term Care Crisis**

Toronto - Outside the Ontario Legislature and in 25 towns across Ontario, the Ontario Health Coalition held protests today to call upon the Ford government to take action to address the critical shortage of staffing and care in long-term care homes. In Ottawa, families and staff describe conditions in which residents were not isolated in recent weeks, staff did not have N-95 masks, staffing levels plummeted leaving 2 PSWs to care for 60 COVID positive residents. Residents were left in filthy conditions with woefully inadequate care, nurses were run off their feet unable to communicate with families and testing was perilously backlogged. There are large COVID-19 outbreaks in Toronto, Ottawa and increasing outbreaks in regions across Southern Ontario. The Coalition has been tracking outbreaks since early March and has now counted 51 currently active outbreaks in long-term care homes and 40 outbreaks in retirement homes across Ontario.

"We had a lull in the summer and we were waiting for the Ford government to take concrete action to shore up the staffing and care levels and prepare for the second wave. That did not happen," warned Natalie Mehra, executive director of the Ontario Health Coalition. "The announcements of funding and staffing in the last two weeks were late, piecemeal, and inadequate. We cannot believe that now in October, 8 months after the outbreaks began, there is still no coherent plan for long-term care in Ontario."

The Ontario government must intervene in homes with outbreaks at a very low threshold and one or two confirmed cases, she said. "Leaving people to die dehydrated, unfed, largely alone is unconscionable," she concluded. "It just cannot happen again."

Jane Meadus, a lawyer with the Advocacy Centre for the Elderly, echoed the concerns about inadequate care. In one example, she said "nourishment is vital to health and there are not enough staff to have the time it takes to feed elderly residents, often with dementia, who need help to eat and drink," she said. "Residents' conditions have deteriorated as a result of isolation, loneliness, and inadequate care. Family caregivers cannot be shut out again and staffing and care levels must be addressed as a priority."

"The Ontario government could have acted back in March when B.C. acted, we could have acted when the military report came out, we could have followed Quebec's example back in May. But Ontario's government has done nothing substantial to address the staffing crisis in long-term care," said Dr. Amit Arya, a Palliative Care Physician in long-term care homes and a board member of the Ontario Health Coalition. "The second wave is already impacting long-term care facilities. Every day of inaction counts. Ontario needs to change the way we are addressing this crisis situation now." Dr. Arya went on to call for a legislated staffing standard that would result in 4-hours of hands-on care, and it needs to be enforceable. He said that the government needs to put its full weight and resources behind reaching that target. We need to ensure that all the staff have access to full-time work, a living wage, sick leave and are only in one long-term care home. Residents need their family caregivers and that needs to be protected in law. Medical teams need to be ready to stand by and provide support and intervention early when there are outbreaks.

The coalition also highlighted as a key issue ending for-profit long-term care and noted that money must go to care and should not be taken out in dividends for shareholders. Speakers noted that tens of millions of dollars have been given in dividends to shareholders during the pandemic, even while the staffing crisis in long-term care has intensified.