



October 26, 2022

The Ford government lied to the public re. their privatization of public hospital services:

Health Coalition demands Ford stop their privatization of our hospitals,
kicks off major campaign to save our local public hospitals

Toronto –The Ontario Health Coalition released a brief today charging that the Ford government lied to the public about its privatization of Ontario’s public hospital services. The Coalition reported that the Ford government significantly *increased* funding to private clinics while at the same time denying that they were expanding the private clinics. The denials were made in written and verbal statements to media across Ontario in the months leading into the election. In addition, the Coalition reports, after outright denial of their plans to privatize prior to the provincial election, as soon as the election was over the Ford government announced it is indeed going to privatize our public hospitals’ services.

The Coalition released the proof in a press conference today, demanding Ford to stop his privatization of our public hospitals’ services and take real action to deal with the emergency in health care that his government had a significant hand in creating. The Coalition also launched a major public campaign to mobilize Ontarians to save our local public hospitals and stop Ford’s privatization. They joined with Democracy Watch to call for an honesty-in-politics law to penalize political parties that engage in misleading the public.

“The Ford government lied to the public leading into an election,” said Natalie Mehra, executive director. “You can’t just outright deny you are expanding private for-profit clinics while you are in fact shunting millions over to expand private for-profit clinics. You can’t pretend you are not going to privatize before an election and then, as soon as the election is over, announce plans to privatize. By every measure, this is wrong. It is fundamentally undemocratic and cannot go without challenge.”

“The Ontario public will not tolerate such deception. Nor will we tolerate the Ford government failing to deal with the strain our public hospitals are under while at the same time funneling public money over to profit seeking corporations to privatize our public hospitals’ services,” she added.

Ms. Mehra announced that the Health Coalition -- which represents more than ¾ of a million Ontarians, more than 400 member organizations and local chapters across the province -- plans for a major fightback including province-wide townhall meetings, community organizing, protests and escalating actions.

“The Ford government has no mandate. They made sure of that when they deceived the public about what they were doing and what they intended to do. We will fight this and we will not stop until they stop privatizing Ontarians’ public hospitals,” she concluded.

“The misleading statements made by Ford government representatives before and during the 2022 provincial election about their plans for Ontario's health care system are just one of many examples of the need for an honesty in politics law to penalize misleaders who violate voters' rights by baiting them with false statements and election promises and then switching direction when they get elected," said Duff Conacher, Co-founder of Democracy Watch, who joined the Coalition in a press conference this morning.

Briefing Note and Evidence:

Pre-Election: Error, Denial & False Statements

Before the election, Health Minister Christine Elliot made a bombshell statement,

"We are opening up pediatric surgeries, cancer screenings...Making sure that we can let independent health facilities operate private hospitals." <https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/1998422595853> (38 second mark).

(Independent Health Facilities are private clinics. [98% of the IHFs are private for-profit](#) according to Ontario's Auditor General. Some do outpatient surgeries. None have overnight stays.)

It was an odd thing to say because the Private Hospitals Act banned private hospitals in Ontario starting 50 years ago—for good reason. Ontario has spent more than 100 years building a public hospital system. The Private Hospitals Act grandfathered-in the existing private hospitals and banned any new ones. It also bans the expansion of the existing private hospitals. There are only two private hospitals left that provide surgeries (Shouldice Hospital and Don Mills). They provide services for healthy patients who are at low risk. (One of our members was recently refused surgery at Shouldice because he has COPD, for example. One of our interns could only get surgery there if he could meet a target weight.) The Minister's statement that the Ford government was going to allow private clinics to operate private hospitals came at the same time as the province was - and continues to - privatizing long-term care, home care, vaccines, COVID testing, and is allowing for-profit virtual care companies and COVID testing corporations to charge patients for access to doctors and vaccines respectively, in violation of the Canada Health Act. There was sufficient reason to be deeply concerned.

The Ontario Health Coalition immediately held 20 virtual local press conferences followed by 20 local emergency summits across the province to raise the alarm. They encouraged the media to question the government about the Minister's statement. Representatives from the Ministry of Health attended some of these summits. Spokespeople from the Minister's office got in touch with reporters and/or answered media interviews. The Minister's spokespeople claimed that the Minister misspoke or was misinterpreted. They categorically denied plans to expand private health clinics and hospitals. They actually said that any claim that they were expanding private clinics was "categorically false".

Examples:

1. "These claims are categorically false...To be clear, the government is committed to supporting the province's public health care system. The use or function of private hospitals and independent health facilities in Ontario is not being expanded or changed." <https://www.therecord.com/news/waterloo-region/2022/03/17/privatization-of-health-care-claims-are-categorically-false-ministers-spokesperson-says.html>
2. Pressed further on the coalition's concern about the potential for an expanded privatization of health-care services and for more private hospitals to open, she said, "No, that is not accurate." <https://www.sudbury.com/top-stories/health-care-privatization-an-election-issue-ontario-health-coalition-5083727>
3. A spokesperson for Elliott and the Ministry of Health denies the allegations by the LHC. "These claims are categorically false...The use or function of private hospitals and independent health facilities in Ontario is not being expanded or changed." <https://london.ctvnews.ca/london-health-coalition-fights-to-stop-privatization-of-health-care-with-new-campaign-1.5851916>
4. "Claims that the government is looking to allow more for-profit health care in Ontario (are) categorically false...The use or function of private hospitals and independent health facilities in Ontario is not being expanded or changed." <https://www.intelligencer.ca/news/health-coalition-blasts-private-care-provincial-approach>

These statements were made by Ford government spokespeople Feb - April. However, data from the Financial Accountability Office of Ontario -- a body which reviews Ontario's fiscal reporting and which reports to the Ontario Legislature -- shows that the government in fact doubled the funding for the private clinics [Independent Health Facilities] from the third quarter to the fourth quarter -- the same time period as government spokespeople were definitively claiming they were not expanding the use or function of private clinics. According to the FAO, in the final

quarter of the last fiscal year January 1 - March 31, 2022, the Ford government increased funding to private clinics [Independent Health Facilities] by more than \$13.6 million. This was not because they underspent in previous quarters. Overall for the year, the Ford government increased their projected spending for IHFs by more than \$12 million. See Q4 Spending- Line 305 Independent Health Facilities here: <https://tinyurl.com/3tfejdp5>.

Post-Election:

Despite the categorical claims by the Ford government that they were not intending to privatize and were not expanding privatization, two months after the election, the Ford government announced that they ARE going to privatize public hospital services and expand private for-profit clinics and hospitals:

- "The Ford government announced it will begin funding private clinic surgeries" CityNews, August 18, 2022 <https://toronto.citynews.ca/2022/08/18/ontario-healthcare-plan-to-stay-open/>
- "Ontario Premier Doug Ford says his government is going to "get creative" when looking at how health care can be delivered as the province deals with a staffing crisis in hospitals. Ford said Friday that "everything is on the table" when asked if Ontario is considering further privatization of the health-care system. CTV News, August 12, 2022 <https://toronto.ctvnews.ca/ontario-s-doug-ford-says-he-believes-in-public-health-care-but-government-will-get-creative-1.6025168>
- Ontario Health Minister Sylvia Jones says Doug Ford's government will work with private health clinics to find more "opportunities" for private companies in the public health system. On Thursday, Jones unveiled the government's plan to "relieve" the health system's surgical backlog by "increasing the number of OHIP-covered surgical procedures performed at independent health facilities." Press Progress, August 18, 2022 <https://pressprogress.ca/ontario-health-minister-sylvia-jones-pledges-to-help-private-clinics-find-more-opportunities-in-the-public-health-system/>
- Ontario to fund more private clinic surgeries, Global TV, August 18, 2022 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hIGbUV5HPOY>
- The Ford government's 5-point plan released August 18 states: "Ontario is working with hospital partners to identify innovative solutions to reduce wait times for surgeries and procedures, including considering options for further increasing surgical capacity by increasing the number of OHIP-covered surgical procedures performed at independent health facilities." <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/1002246/ontario-introduces-a-plan-to-stay-open-health-system-stability-and-recovery>

This privatization is not about "stabilizing" the health system or adding capacity. Every large hospital in Ontario has operating rooms that have been closed for weeks or months or even permanently for years due to inadequate funding and, more recently, staffing shortages. Private clinics take scarce staff out of our local public hospitals worsening wait times for the public system. The evidence is that the private clinics charge patients illegal user fees and other fees for medically unnecessary add-ons. This is not about improving health care. It is about expanding a profit-seeking industry that wants access to the billions in public funding for health care. To illustrate:

"Since the pandemic started private health care has grown enormously and a record number of lobbyists have registered with private health care companies to lobby for increased privatization or outsourcing...

Statistics from the office of Ontario's Integrity Commissioner note that more lobbyists have registered to influence health policy than on nearly any other issue – 1,137 registrations – aside from "economic development and trade"...Since the start of the pandemic, reports have indicated private virtual care, private health testing and even private health facilities have grown enormously..."

Press Progress, May 4, 2022 <https://pressprogress.ca/here-are-all-the-corporations-lobbying-doug-ford-to-privatize-and-outsource-parts-of-ontarios-health-care-system/>