

Ontario Health Coalition

OHC
NEWSFLASH
January 2002



Ontario Updates

Conservatives Yank Community Control of Homecare

Just before Christmas, the provincial Conservatives passed Bill 130, An Act Respecting Community Care Access Corporations. The Bill, completely removes all democratic community control over homecare. Included in its provisions are the following:

1. Hundreds of community memberships in CCACs will be discontinued as the CCACs become statutory corporations.
2. Current elected Boards of CCACs will be replaced with Boards appointed by the provincial government.
3. Current elected CCAC Chairs and Vice-Chairs may be replaced by those appointed by the provincial government.
4. The hiring and firing of Executive Directors may be ordered by the government.
5. Over forty current CEOs are to be terminated unless the government appoints them as Executive Directors under this Act.
6. The public will have access only to Annual Reports of CCACs. Other information is to be available only if the Minister deems "necessary to the public interest."

Far from actually reforming the homecare system set up by the provincial Conservative government in 1997, this Act simply serves to silence the Boards and CEOs of the CCACs who have recently become some of the government's most vociferous critics.

But homecare cuts are no secret in communities across the province. Privately, workers have begun to refer to the Community Care Access Centres as "No Access" Centres. Homecare is called "Dip and Skip" - a reference to the scant time that personal support workers are given to bathe clients. While this Bill may achieve a censorship of the CCACs, the problems resulting from the provinces' short-sighted health care policies are not going away.

Despite ministerial promises to the contrary, there has been no consultation whatsoever on homecare reform - reform that covers the fastest growing sector in Ontario's health care system. Bill 130 is a shocking assault on democracy and should be withdrawn. If the government will not withdraw the Bill, the Ontario Health Coalition demands that it be sent to committee hearings.

*A report on this issue including details about the impact of budget cuts across the province was released by the OHC. Called **Dip and Skip: A Supplement to the June 2001 Report on Homecare Reform in Ontario** it is available on the OHC website.*

Cancer treatment privatized without considering public options: Auditor

The Ontario Health Coalition renewed demands for an end to private cancer treatment after the release of a critical Special Audit by the Provincial Auditor in mid-December. Among the key findings in the Special Audit

I. The auditor found little evidence that Cancer Care Ontario (CCO) had considered public not-for-profit delivery options nor had it compared costs in the for-profit and public realms before privatizing the after-hours cancer treatment clinic at Sunnybrook Hospital.

II. The Ministry is funding the privatized cancer treatment centre at a higher level than it is funding public cancer treatment centres - \$500 more per treatment - in addition to \$4 million in start-up funding.

III. Cancer Care Ontario acted in violation of the government's policy of requiring a fair, open and transparent competitive process in awarding the contract to Canadian Radiation Oncology Services Ltd., headed by Dr. Tom McGowan who was Executive Vice President of Cancer Care Ontario until after his company received the contract for the privatized cancer treatment centre.



Province Hands Off Millions in Public Assets to Developers

In December, the two most openly dogmatic "Common Sense Revolutionaries" made an alarming announcement. At a press conference in Brampton, Tory leadership hopefuls Tony Clement and Jim Flaherty unveiled the first private hospital building scheme in Ontario. This joint SuperBuild Ontario & Ministry of Health project will kick off with a request for proposal (RFP) asking private for-profit developers to make proposals to design, build, finance, own and maintain the hospitals. Billed as Public Private Partnerships (PPPs), the private hospitals are planned expansions of the existing facilities in Brampton and Ottawa.

If their plans are successful, Ontarians will pay to lease these hospitals for an entire generation - reportedly over 30 years - after which the profit-seeking consortiums will own them. The land, in the case of the Brampton hospital, will be given to the private consortium for free. This no-risk sweetheart deal for private developers is just the type of scheme that has drawn massive public ire in Britain. British Prime Minister Tony Blair has faced a revolt from key Labour Party supporters after evidence of disastrous experiments with PPPs were made public in the British Medical Journal. U.K. journalist George Monbiot, in his recent book *Captive State* notes, "...the British Medical Association has found the cost of the schemes has risen by an average of 72%."

The Ontario Health Coalition has criticized the plans as short-sighted and costly. "This is shameful," stated Ottawa Health Coalition member and former co chair of the Ontario Health Coalition Dan Benedict. "It's part of the drive to do everything possible, no matter how much it costs in terms of quality of care or money, to privatize everything they can."

The Word from the Streets

Survey of Toronto's homeless finds health access tough

In July 2001, the Ontario government distributed a survey to households throughout the province. People without permanent, those who struggle with literacy, and non-English reading Ontarians were left out. In response, a groups of organizations including the Ontario Health Coalition organized to create and deliver our own survey among Toronto's underhoused, homeless and diverse people. Over 250 surveys were completed in just a few weeks. Boosting the support for universal, accessible, comprehensive Medicare, many surveyed talked about their inability to afford existing out-of-pocket health costs. Respondents also highlighted the importance of community health centres and hospital emergency departments. The results showed the need for sensitivity training among front-line staff with regards to race/ethnicity/culture, poverty and homelessness. The best thing about Ontario's health system? In the words of one survey respondent, "That my family and I have access to health care even though we're poor."

A big thanks to all involved in the project. Sponsoring organizations include: Ontario Health Coalition, Parkdale Activity and Recreation Centre, Parkdale Community Health Centre, Queen West Community Health Centre, Regent Park Community Health Centre, SHOUT Clinic, Street Health, The 519 Church Street Community Centre, The Friendship Centre. For a copy of the full report, please call Street Health at 416-532-0544.

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