



Health Restructuring and Women's Access to Medicare

Women are Saying:

- Individuals who are chronically ill, use to receive 5-6 hours of care. Now they get 1-2 hours per week because of homecare cut backs.
- Women get sent home from hospital to return to their household daily chores without support.
- New moms go home sooner with no community support in place.
- Wives, daughters and mothers are delivering complex care at home.
- There are less staff in nursing homes and women caregivers are burnt out.
- Women caregivers can not get the respite that they need.
- There are huge waiting lists for mental health assessments and no beds.
- Privatization means less access to care and support. It means worse jobs and more unpaid caregiving.

What's happened?

Over the last decade federal and provincial government funding cuts have radically changed the face of our public health care system.

The Provincial Conservative government engaged in "hospital restructuring" leading to:

- Over 40 hospitals ordered closed and amalgamated.
- Approximately 9,000 critical, acute and chronic care hospital beds cut in the mid 1990s.
- Approximately 26,000 hospital workers and nurses laid off between 1995-1999.

- Almost \$1 billion cut from hospitals in the mid 1990s.
- The Provincial Conservative government ordered "competitive bidding" homecare.
- The Victorian Order of Nurses and Red Cross closed up in many communities across the province and their non-profit services were replaced by for-profit corporations.
- Caps were set on levels of homecare that are accessible through the public system.
- Most new nursing home beds were privatized by the Provincial Conservatives.
- Patients were moved from chronic care hospital beds to long term care (nursing homes) beds where they would be funded at ½ the previous rate.
- Waiting lists for nursing homes ballooned as hospital beds were cut and caps were put on homecare.
- Resident and staff protections in homes were eliminated as regulations setting minimum staffing levels were removed by the Provincial Conservatives.

What Women Want:

- A healthcare system designed to respond to population need.
- Re-opening of closed hospital beds to suit population need.
- Non-profit homecare designed to meet population need.
- Medicare coverage for homecare, including rehabilitation and respite.
- Reform of and support for primary healthcare to improve access to physicians, nurse practitioners, emergency care and the range of health care providers needed.
- Improved access to the full range of mental health services.
- Re-regulation of staffing standards and facility inspections for nursing homes.
- The roll back of private for-profit healthcare.
- Special attention to the particular access problems of ethno-cultural minorities, disabled women, Aboriginal women, women with mental illnesses and marginalized women.
- Pro-active consultation of women; workers and caregivers regarding health restructuring.

Listen Up! Women and the Future of Medicare

The last decade has seen dramatic changes to the basic structure of Medicare and its delivery. Women, as the majority of caregivers, frontline health care worker and as patients have felt the brunt of these changes, through privatization, de-regulation, cuts and downloading of care. The Ontario Health Coalition has created this project "Listen Up! Women and the Future of Medicare" to help engage women in the debate about the future of Medicare.