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Attn: Assignment Editor

For Immediate Release

Ontario Health Coalition Supports Drug Legislation: it will contain escalating drug costs without harming patients

Toronto – The Ontario Health Coalition held a press conference today to express support for several key elements of Bill 102 and the accompanying drug strategy announced by Ontario's government.

“ The measures that the provincial government is proposing are reasonable and the evidence shows that they won't adversely affect the health of patients,” said Dr. Joel Lexchin, an emergency room physician at University Health Network, professor of Health Policy at York University, and author of numerous books and articles on pharmaceuticals. “ The goal is to control provincial expenditures on prescription drugs without shifting the burden onto the backs of patients.”

“ Any money that the provincial government saves with these measures needs to be reinvested back into the social safety system, not used to finance tax cuts. The responsibility of elected politicians for listing and delisting of drugs must be maintained,” advised Dr. Lexchin.

“ Patients require access to care and treatment that are sometimes provided by drugs, and sometimes provided through hospitals, homecare, community care or nursing homes. Escalating drug costs place competing demands on scarce health care dollars. It is important that the spiralling costs of drugs be contained to protect our access to the whole range of services provided by the public health system,” noted Derek Chadwick, a representative on the OHC board from Canadian Pensioners Concerned. “ We support the widening of access to generic drugs that the government has prescribed.”

“ We believe that the provisions in this Bill to contain the costs and practices of the drug industry are positive and necessary for the sustainability of the public health system,” added Eduardo Sousa, spokesperson for the Council of Canadians and OHC board member. “ We will continue to work with the Health Coalition towards the creation of a universal National Pharmacare program for all Canadians, accompanied by an appropriately rigorous regulatory regime for the pharmaceutical industry.”

“ This Bill contains provisions that will effectively balance the need to control costs with the need to provide medically necessary treatments for patients. These are positive steps for the public health system,” added Natalie Mehra, director of the Ontario Health Coalition.

“ When these measures go through we need to be sure that we still retain political accountability for what goes on in the drug plan. Regarding the plans to create a new “ Executive Officer” in charge of listing and delisting drugs and negotiating prices, we support the efforts to negotiate the best price for Ontarians' medications. In addition, we will work to ensure that the new powers for the Executive Officer do not enable the current or any future Health Minister to evade political accountability for decisions regarding what is on and off Ontario's drug formulary,” she concluded.

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