

Ontario Health Coalition

MEDIA
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE **Attention: Assignment Editors**

Slamming Ontario's Medicare Record, Coalition Calls For Decisive Federal Action

Toronto - The Ontario Health Coalition is in Ottawa during the First Ministers' Meeting today to call for an uncompromising role for the federal government in setting and enforcing national standards for the provision of health care.

"Giving in to Mike Harris' standards means that their massive privatization, burgeoning out-of-pocket costs, and the creation of two-tier Medicare will continue unfettered," says Dan Benedict, Co-Chair of the Ontario Health Coalition. "It flies in the face of reason to rely on provincial governments which are ideologically opposed to Public Medicare to set the standards for its protection. It is like setting the fox to guard the chickens. The federal government needs to act promptly and decisively to set national standards for the provision of publicly administered health care that covers the range from community and home to institutional care."

The Ontario Health Coalition reiterates its call for a federal plan to reinvest \$4.6 billion each year in federal transfers for health care. However, there must be strings attached. In a letter to the Prime Minister, the Ontario Health Coalition slammed the Harris administration's record on public Medicare, including:

- the use of public money to finance building of long term care facilities for private profit-making companies.
- the privatization of home care services even when they are proven to cost more.
- the imposition of user fees to the point that Ontarians are paying more out-of-pocket expenses for health care than people in any other province.
- costs and confusion in so-called hospital restructuring.
- continuing cuts throughout the health care system, even while the government is paying lip service to expansion groups.

"Any further discussion about the future of Medicare must be democratized," states Irene Harris, Co-Chair of the Ontario Health Coalition. "Public Medicare is being threatened as never before without any public mandate whatsoever. We are calling upon Jean Chretien to immediately implement an open and transparent process for meaningful public input."

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