



For Immediate Release

Attn: Assignment Desk

May 6, 2019

Ontario Health Coalition Statement on Today's Mental Health Funding Announcement by Ford Government

Note: Ford government cut \$330 million per year from mental health funding last summer. and the Coalition questions whether today's announcement is just a re-announcement of previously announced funding (which was, in any case, actually a cut).

Today the Ford government announced mental health funding that appears had previously been announced, and in any case is actually a cut to planned mental health funding. This is being reported by the media as if it is an increase and as if it is new money without any critical analysis. From the government's own numbers, we do not believe this is the case.

In the 2018 Ontario Budget an increase for mental health funding was passed by the Ontario Legislature. The amount totalled \$2.1 billion over 4 years. That was in excess of the federal transfer for mental health funding. It was a significant infusion of resources into this sector that is notoriously under-resourced, plagued by long wait-lists and a severe shortage of OHIP-covered services.

Last summer, as one of its first cuts, the Ford government announced \$1.9 billion in mental health funding over 10-years. They made this announcement as if it was an increase. In reality it was a decrease in the planned mental health funding that had been passed by the Legislature a few months earlier. (\$2.1 billion over 4-years down to \$1.9 billion over 10-years.) The Official Opposition NDP reported to the Legislature that the cut amounts to \$330 million per year.

Bottom line: The Ford government is funding mental health care at \$330 million per year less than was passed by the Ontario Legislature in 2018.

Today, Ford's Health Minister, Christine Elliott revealed plans for \$174 million in mental health funding. The reported grand total of funding over 10-years, though, has not changed. (The Ford government is saying that federal and provincial funding will equal \$3.8 billion over 10-years. This is what they have been saying since last summer and it hasn't gone up by \$174 million. So it appears to be the same, which makes this appear to be a re-announcement of the same money that was announced before.)

In any case, as noted above, the Ford government cut \$330 million per year from planned mental health funding and is now claiming that it is increasing mental health funding by a one-time announcement of \$174 million. By anyone's math, this is still a very significant reduction in planned mental health funding and means that many many needed services will not be provided.

From the media stories, it appears no one asked the Health Minister whether this is new funding, above the \$1.9 billion already announced in multiple re-announcements over the last year. If it is additional funding, it should be asked, will they replace the rest of what they cut last summer?

The reason this matters is because we are hearing of planned cuts to psychotherapy services, which are already incredibly hard to access, and there are real-dollar cuts now underway in public hospitals across the province, impacting mental health services everywhere in Ontario. It matters, not just because mental health services require much more support, but because the dishonesty of the Ford government is a danger to our democracy.

Last week we held a rally of approximately 10,000 people outside the Ontario Legislature. The government is planning to cut 49 local ambulance services, and we have received a document that shows that there is a plan to privatize land ambulance services. The government is planning to cut 25 local public health units. They are just about to pass a provincial budget that contains real-dollar cuts to public hospitals despite promising to "end hallway medicine" and giving Ontarians the impression that they would not engage in cuts. There are cuts happening already at hospitals in various parts of Ontario. They cut autism services, the College of Midwives, OHIP+, planned overdose prevention sites and let the surge funding for hospital beds run out so that the surge beds have closed down even though we have an overcrowding crisis in our province. They have passed new legislation (Bill 74) that gives the Minister and their new "Super Agency" sweeping new powers to order the privatization of significant health care services and leaked documents from the upper tier of the Health Ministry show plans to privatize eHealth, air ambulance, public laboratories, nursing home inspections and other services. The opposition parties proposed amendments that would have prohibited privatization and cuts under each section of the new law that gave the Minister and Super Agency these powers, yet the Ford government used their majority to vote every single one of these amendments down. Yet, when confronted, the Health Minister's response is denial, obfuscation and dissembling.