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## **Budget Health Care Briefing: What is being Cut, Myth Buster, What is Coming**

TORONTO, April 11, 2019 (GLOBE NEWSWIRE) -- In anticipation of this afternoon's budget the Ontario Health Coalition provided a budget health care briefing for Ontarians. The Coalition will issue an update after the budget is released.

"There has been a lot of re-announcements and PR spin to cover for what is the leading edge of the most aggressive cuts in our province's history," warned Natalie Mehra, executive director of the Ontario Health Coalition.

Myth buster:

Some cuts take the form of allowing programs to end without replacement. "For example," said Ms. Mehra, "The hospital surge funding announced last fall has run out and we are hearing reports of those beds having been closed down across Ontario. This is the opposite of Mr. Ford's promise to end hallway medicine. To meet population need, by a reasonable evidence-based projection, we will require an investment of 4.5 per cent per year in public hospital funding. We will be measuring the budget against this."

"Repeatedly re-announced long-term care beds is not the answer to "ending hallway medicine" in hospitals: this is disingenuous. Long-term care is not the same as hospital care. It will not reduce surgical and diagnostic wait lists. It will not get care to the people waiting in emergency departments and on stretchers in hallways for access to hospital acute care beds and other hospital beds that have been cut beyond anything that is seen anywhere in the developed world."

"Ontario has already shifted more care out of hospitals to long-term care homes and home care than any other province in Canada and we now have the fewest hospital beds left. In any case, there are already approximately 33,000 patients on wait lists for long-term care beds – more than the total number of long-term care beds planned over the next 15-years."

The Ontario Health Coalition is reporting that the following have been cut by the Ford government so far:

- Planned cuts to OHIP: Leaked documents reportedly show plan to cut OHIP-covered services by \$500 million.
- Changes to autism services: In February the Ford government moved to a flat-rate amount for every child instead of needs-based funding and it imposed a cut-off for funding, meaning that older children received very little funding. In March, changes were announced that would mean 8,400 children would be moved out of the Ontario Autism Program on April 1 and pushed into the school system with no proper transition plan, and funding provided for the school system only to cover 1,105 new children. They announced \$12,300 funding per new student but that was a re-announcement of already existing initiatives, not a new investment. Later in March changes were

announced to eliminate income testing as a criteria for service, broaden the range of eligible services (eg. speech language pathology, occupational therapy), extend contracts for families already receiving service under previous program for 6 months. However, the Ford government is proceeding with the flat-rate funding for autistic children based on age and not needs and the age cut offs are still in place.

- Cut OHIP+: the program that expanded public drug coverage to Ontarians under 25 years old was cut by the Doug Ford government the day after Mr. Ford was sworn in, making it the first major cut. Families with sick youth and children will now have to use private drug plans if they have them first, and if rejected from private plans will have to apply to the public plan. This means that they will be subject to increasing requirements for co-payments and deductibles that can amount to hundreds of dollars or more per month for families with children or youth with cancer, for example. Who benefits? Private insurance companies. Who is hurt? Families with sick children.
- Cut in planned mental health funding: The major investment announced in the 2018 budget by the previous government was cut dramatically by the Ford government in the summer. Ford announced the money as if it was new funding when in fact it was a re-announcement of the former funding, but only less by \$380 million. The bottom line? The Ford government cut \$335 million from mental health funding.
- Cut all new overdose prevention sites.
- Cut the investment in the dementia strategy.

The Ontario Health Coalition will provide an update on the budget once it has been released. The Health Coalition's executive director, Natalie Mehra is at Queen's Park this afternoon and will be available for comment.

Please note: In a profoundly undemocratic move, the Ford government has refused Ms. Mehra and the Health Coalition, entry into the budget lock up this afternoon for the first time ever. The Coalition has always been in the budget lock up going back decades (including multiple different governments). Other organizations also have been refused access to the budget lock up for the first time, the Coalition reports.

The Coalition is warning that the Ford government is becoming increasingly autocratic and undemocratic. The refusal to allow access to the budget lock up for public interest groups that might criticize this government follows the Ford government's recent railroading through of Bill 74, the Coalition reports. This is the sweeping new health restructuring law that gives the Minister and a new Super Agency vast powers to order and coerce mergers and mega-mergers of local hospitals and other health services, privatization of health care services, contracting out of health care services, transfers of services from one town to another and one provider to another, centralization of services, cuts to services and closures of entire services, according to the Coalition's analysis. In the most undemocratic process for health restructuring in our province's history, the Coalition reports, the Ford government held only two part-days of hearings on the new law, in Toronto only, in which more than 1,500 people who applied to be heard did not get standing to be heard. Ontarians were given 1 ½ days only to apply for standing. Amendments had to be sent in before the deadline for written submissions was over, meaning that the 19,000+ pages of written submissions sent in by Ontarians were not taken seriously, and the Ford government voted down all of the amendments that would have required them to stop privatization and cuts.

The Coalition warned today that they are gearing up to fight major cuts, mega-mergers, and privatization as a result of this new law.

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