



February 27, 2019
For Immediate Release

Attn: Assignment Editor

Health Care Omnibus Bill Sets Up Ontario for Health System Mega-Mergers & Privatization: Worse than the Leaked Draft, Health Coalition Warns

Toronto – The Ontario Health Coalition released its preliminary analysis of the new health care omnibus bill today. Health Coalition spokespeople expressed deep concerns about the legislation and the sweeping upheaval to come. The legislation that was made public yesterday is worse than the draft bill in significant ways: it requires even bigger mega-mergers; has less protections; the Minister's new powers appear to be even more sweeping, and; it includes what appear to be unprecedented sweeping powers for Cabinet.

"The Minister is trying to put a happy face on it by using words like 'coordination' and 'teams' ", noted Natalie Mehra, executive director of the Ontario Health Coalition who has served at the leadership level of the Health Coalition for more than 23-years through the Harris-era restructuring, the creation of the LHINs and the Wynne government restructuring. Under her leadership the Health Coalition has won public interest amendments to virtually every piece of health legislation introduced during the last 15 years. "But what is actually written in the legislation is that the Minister and the Ford government have given themselves vast new powers to order health service closures, transfers, mega-mergers, and the like, including powers to privatize and to facilitate the for-profit privatization of significant parts of our public and non-profit health care services."

The Minister has laid out what she says will happen with the legislation – voluntary "teams" of for-profit and non-profit health service providers will come together and will ultimately cover virtually all health services in the province. Even if that were the case – and to be clear, that is not what is articulated in the new law -- it is a real problem, reported Health Coalition Co-Chair Ross Sutherland, M.A., R.N. author and policy expert on laboratory privatization in Canada. "Even if the result out of years of mergers and integrations and transfers and so on was that there would be some sort of amalgam of all existing health services, who then oversees these providers in the public interest? No one. There is no public governance and just the far-away Super Agency for oversight." He noted, adding, "The majority of the services to be merged are for-profit, dominated by highly-organized chain corporations, so there is real risk that the values and the tenets of the non-profit health system would be lost. It is hard to imagine how the public interest could be protected in such a scenario."

Furthermore, he noted, in every case where this type of conglomerate approach has been tried in Ontario, it has failed, citing private laboratories and home care experiments.

"No one has been consulted on the government's plan to give it and its political appointees that will run the new Super Agency wide reaching new powers virtually without any restrictions," noted Sutherland.

Furthermore, said Ms. Mehra, "Paltry as they were, virtually all the public interest protections in the LHINs legislation have been dropped along with any remaining democracy and local control in the health system," citing examples such as the decision by the government to take out provisions regarding open Board Meetings, appeals, access to documents, community consultation and so on. "The power in the health system to snap up and take over local health care services will go to the large empire-building CEOs and large chain companies that will make proposals across the province to take over health care. The new powers that the government has given itself and its appointees to effect these changes include pressure upto and including hostile takeovers and coercive funding measures that are written

into the legislation. There is no recourse to appeal, no public process, no public right to access to information, no public ability to give any meaningful feedback at all on these decisions.

“The bottom line? This legislation neither directs the health system to meet the population’s need for care, nor does it improve any single service. It opens no new hospital beds. It does not make more surgeries happen. It does not provide a single new unit of mental health services, or home care or any other kind of care. It is all about new powers for certain people at the expense of the smaller or even medium-sized services, the care workers who will suffer years of upheaval, the community-based organizations, and the local say over our health care,” she concluded.

The Health Coalition is planning town hall meetings across Ontario leading into a mass rally on April 30 at noon outside the Legislature. They are calling on the Ford government to hold public hearings on the new omnibus health care restructuring bill.

The Ontario Health Coalition analysis of the legislation is on the webpage at www.ontariohealthcoalition.ca