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For Immediate Release

Homecare Under Threat of Long Term Privatization: New Report Reveals Litany of Problems in Competitive Bidding Process

Toronto - In response to large protests in Ottawa, St. Catharines and Toronto, the Minister of Health announced a review of competitive bidding in homecare last fall. Elinor Caplan has been appointed to conduct the review. However, she has stated that her mandate is to review "procurement procedure" not competitive bidding, despite the Minister's announcement. Her review is scheduled to be delivered to the Ministry of Health tomorrow, April 1.

In response, the Ontario Health Coalition has conducted its own review of the competitive bidding system that has ushered in for-profit privatization in homecare. The results were released in a press conference today.

Among the findings:

- 6 large corporations now hold 76% of homecare nursing contracts, compared to 8 agencies holding 66% of the contracts in 1995. Small community-based agencies have been virtually eliminated in the sector.
- 1,050 workers have been laid off as contracts were lost in recent months.
- Over 22,000 clients have been affected as their careworkers were laid off in contract losses.

"Unfortunately, the Caplan review process is another exercise in rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic," stated Pat Armstrong Professor of Sociology and Women's Studies at York University. "As this report clearly indicates, what is sinking homecare is competitive bidding and not simply the procurement process that is the sole focus of Ms. Caplan's review. Only a thorough, public and evidence-based review of competitive bidding can ensure Ontario residents get the quality of care they need at the price that respects care providers and care recipients."

"If they adopt a long-term strategy to continue competitive bidding, the Liberal government will embrace long-term privatization," stated Ross Sutherland, registered nurse and coalition spokesperson. "We are extremely concerned that the government is refusing to consider the poor performance of the profit-system. We are paying the price through poor working conditions, high administrative costs, disruptions in care, and a climate of fear for nurses, clients and support workers."

"Needed now is a more open review that asks fundamental questions about how to build a stable and sustainable system of homecare that is responsive to patients discharged from hospitals and to elderly and disabled citizens living in the community," concluded Jane Aronson, Professor and Director of Social Work at McMaster University.

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