



January 22, 2020
For Immediate Release

Attn: Assignment Editor

New CBC Hospital Overcrowding Data Should Compel Much More Substantive & Urgent Response from Ford Government: Health Coalition

Toronto – Responding to the CBC’s release of new Ontario hospital overcrowding data that shows the majority of the province’s hospitals have been operating at gravely unsafe levels of overcrowding for more than a month out of the most recent six months measured, the Ontario Health Coalition reported that the data should spark outrage. One-third of Ontario’s hospitals hit levels of overcrowding that are higher than those deemed a “humanitarian crisis” by the Red Cross in the U.K. The numbers are unparalleled in any jurisdiction we have seen in the developed world, says the Coalition, which has organized mass protests over the last year of thousands of patients, front-line hospital nurses, professionals, support workers, doctors and advocates, calling for a stop to the cuts and restoration of services. The Coalition released its pre-budget report this week. The report adds to the CBC data by using national health care database figures to calculate Ontario’s ranking compared with other provinces and international jurisdiction in terms of hospital funding and hospital capacity. The data is available here: <https://www.ontariohealthcoalition.ca/index.php/ontario-pre-budget-hearing-2020/>

The Coalition expressed anger that the provincial government and hospital leadership continue to use the same rhetoric to cover for cuts that hospital-cutting governments have used for the last 25 years. Coalition spokesperson Natalie Mehra said that too little is being done address the suffering of patients who cannot access care. This situation is a result of provincial government choices that have adopted the most radical hospital downsizing of any jurisdiction in Canada or among our peer nations as cornerstone health restructuring policy for decades.

“The Ford government and hospital leaders continue to make false claims that even more patients can be offloaded from hospitals to other (cheaper) levels of care. This is unconscionable given the suffering we are already seeing and given the data that irrefutably shows that Ontario’s hospitals are being run at levels of overcrowding that are dangerous and inhumane,” said Natalie Mehra, executive director of the Ontario Health Coalition. “Far from “ending hallway medicine” the Ford government has adopted the same tired excuses and rhetoric to cover for cuts and downsizing as the previous government while the situation has measurably worsened. This is not a partisan issue. It is unsound public policy that has created a crisis in patient care that must be addressed urgently by reopening closed beds and wards, reopening Operating Rooms that are closed because there is not enough funding for them, and restore funding to improve care.”

In its pre-budget data run released this week the Coalition found that:

- Ontario hospitals have 14,320 fewer hospital beds staffed and in operation compared to the average of other provinces in Canada. (Aggregate per person beds.) Our province has the fewest hospital beds left per person of anywhere in the country. Yet there are closed wards and even entire floors in hospitals across the province due to funding constraints and bed cuts are continuing even today.
- Ontario has fallen in rankings compared to all OECD countries in the number of hospital beds staffed and in operation per capita. Ontario ranks third last and the only countries with fewer beds are Chile and Mexico.
- Ontario has the least nursing care per patient of any province.
- Ontario funds its hospitals at the lowest rate of any province, which has led to the most radical hospital downsizing in Canada.
- Ontario funds all of health care at the second lowest rate of any province.
- Ontario’s wait list for long-term care beds has climbed to more than 36,200 over the last year.

- The Fiscal Accountability Office of Ontario released a report in October projecting that once the 15,000 long-term care beds that the Ford government promised to build in 5-years are complete, the long-term care wait list will have increased to 37,000 due to the increase in the elderly population needing care. Note: not even the first 100 of those promised beds are built yet.

The Coalition warns that privatization is not a solution. Private residential care is beyond the means of even higher income Ontarians and many private residential care facilities are entirely unregulated with dubious safety and user charges that are both exorbitant and violate the Canada Health Act. Private home care is also extremely expensive. Private hospitals and clinics charge user fees that range from two to five times the cost of OHIP-covered services, according to two major surveys of private clinics' pricing done by the Ontario Health Coalition. Privatization would yield a whole new array of suffering and user fees, undermine regulatory regimes that protect patients from harm, draw public funds away from care to profit-taking and increase costs.

The Coalition notes that the evidence demonstrates the need to restore public hospital funding to the average of the rest of Canada and to rebuild capacity, including reopening acute and complex continuing care hospital beds, reopening Operating Rooms as soon as possible and developing a real evidence-based capacity plan to meet population need for hospital care.