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For Immediate Release

Attn: Assignment Editor

COVID-19 numbers still escalating in a “devastating” way in Ontario’s long-term care homes: Health Coalition calls a Day of Action to press Ford government for more concrete measures to stop the spread and stabilize the sector

Toronto – As the Ontario Health Coalition is completing the gargantuan task of updating its tracking of the spread of COVID-19 in health care settings that now encompasses thousands of staff, patients and residents, it is reporting that the infectious disease continues its devastation through long-term care and retirement homes. The Coalition has called for an online Day of Action tomorrow to press the provincial government for more concrete measures.

The Day of Action, to be held tomorrow, Friday May 1, is an online event in which Ontarians are asked to join a virtual rally by posting their picture with a sign calling on the Ford government to undertake concrete measures to #FixLTCFord. The Day of Action will be posted on a Facebook Event page, and individual pictures will be posted on Facebook feeds, Twitter and Instagram using the hashtag #FixLTCFord. Information is posted on the Ontario Health Coalition Facebook page and the Facebook event is posted here:

<https://www.facebook.com/events/244816503381892/>

Key asks of the Ford government are: immediately improved access to PPE; permanently improved wages & working conditions; 4-hour minimum care standard; better infection control; no more for-profit long-term care.

The Coalition reported on the situation on the ground in long-term care and retirement homes from dozens of phone calls, correspondence and emails received every day from residents and families. In addition, the Coalition held an emergency weekly meeting of its long-term care committee today including family councils, resident advocacy groups, unions, health professionals, nurses and seniors’ organizations. The Coalition is hearing from all corners of Ontario. While measures that have been announced by the provincial government are welcome and sincerely appreciated, still there remains a dangerous disconnect between what the Premier has said he is going to do and the actual policy measures undertaken by his government, reported coalition spokesperson Natalie Mehra. There is a further disconnect between the directives and what is actually happening. The Coalition has outlined its findings here:

Overall, there have been measures undertaken and there have been improvements. In calling for concrete improvements the Coalition does not want to take away from what has been done, particularly: improved testing; improved access to PPE; the very significant \$4-hour wage increase; some measures to help increase staffing on a temporary and sporadic basis; improved isolation in some homes; safer requirements regarding admissions and readmissions. Still, there are significant problems and concrete measures remain to be done that would help to stop the spread and stabilize the long-term care, and the Coalition called for real commitments from the Ford government on these concrete issues.

Long-term care staffing shortages are critical:

- Homes are desperately short staffed. The staffing crisis that emerged, particularly among PSWs but also for nurses and other staff, in the last two years has become much worse. Homes do not have enough staff to operate safely.
- The provincial government has left the coordination of redeployment of hospital “swat teams” to voluntary arrangements between hospitals and long-term care homes. The redeployments are chaotic, without clear management on site, without access to computers and med carts on site, without proper briefings prior to

deployment, without clear assignment of tasks. Some homes are getting voluntary deployments of staff, some are not. Some have had one but no others, etc.

- Staff have been required to choose one workplace and have given up other part-time work and income to do so. The provincial government gave a temporary wage top up of \$4 per hour for long-term care staff, but has left it to providers as to whether they replace lost hours or not. Some homes have replaced all hours and some have not.
- There has been no concrete permanent policy to improve wages and conditions for the workforce in order to stabilize it and redress the exploitative conditions that many long-term care staff have been working under. This sector needs concrete lasting policy that will improve the wages, benefits and workload issues if Ontario is to find a path out of this crisis.
- There is total consensus that residents, families and staff alike need a regulated, enforced minimum care standard of an average of 4-hours of care per day in order to protect residents and staff from inadequate care, high rates of violence and injury. The Coalition is calling for a commitment from the Ford government that they will implement this minimum care standard to stabilize the sector going forward.

Testing is incomplete and very slow:

- Despite repeated commitments and announcements by the Premier followed, slowly, by correspondence directing testing of all residents and staff in long-term care and retirement homes (mid-last week), still long-term care homes, even those with outbreaks, have not had all residents and staff tested. The situation is worse in retirement homes.

Access to PPE has improved in long-term care but not other community care, and still there are operators not in compliance:

- There has been an improvement in access to PPE for long-term care staff, but it is not complete.
- Staff are reporting that this week they have been required to wear garbage bags instead of proper PPE.
- Unions are reporting that some home managements are still not compliant with provincial directives regarding proper access to PPE for staff.
- The provincial government has not used its legislated powers to revoke licenses of the homes with the most egregious practices and to appoint management to take over the homes. Both the powers and the precedent exist for these and there has been no explanation as to why the Ford government will not use these powers.
- Access to PPE and/or compliance with provincial directives is worse in retirement homes, community care and other congregate care and support settings. Outbreaks are continuing to spread quickly in these settings.

No commitment to stop for-profit privatization of long-term care

- The evidence of poorer outcomes and lower care levels in for-profit versus non-profit and public long-term care is abundant and has been for decades.
- Almost all of the largest outbreaks in long-term care are happening in for-profit long-term care homes.
- The for-profit long-term care industry has led the charge campaigning for deregulation, fewer and lesser inspections, less enforcement, expansion of funding into profit-taking funding envelopes rather than improving care. For-profit long-term care chains, which dominate ownership Ontario's long-term care sector, have paid tens of millions of dollars in dividends to shareholders each year as the staffing crisis was emerging in long-term care and as direct hands-on care hours were going down.
- The Coalition is calling for a commitment from the Ford government that the new capacity in long-term care will be built in the public interest, not for profit-taking interests, under the ownership and control of public and non-profit long-term care homes.