



MEDIA RELEASE: The Ford government is starving local public hospitals to privatize them, charge health advocates

Toronto, February 21, 2024 – A new report, [*Robbing from the public to build the private: The Ford government's hospital privatization scheme*](#) reveals that local hospitals in every region of Ontario have operating rooms sitting idle the majority of the time. The public has funded local hospitals for more than 70 years to build operating room capacity that is unused while the Ford government is shunting unprecedented public money to private for-profit clinics and hospitals to build new operating rooms, the Coalition reports.

For the last year, the Coalition researched the unused capacity in local public hospitals through Freedom of Information requests and interviews with surgical staff. They gathered figures from Ontario government budget and expense documents, media reports, contracts and accountability agreements to provide a litany of examples of much higher costs and large funding increases provided by the Ford government to for-profit corporation clinics, hospitals and staffing agencies. At the same time, the government has imposed dollar cuts, deficits, and wage caps on public hospitals, robbing them of the ability to attract and retain staff and use their existing operating room capacity. For example, the following communities have operating rooms that are functional but unused: Alexandria, Brockville, Cambridge, Hawkesbury, Kitchener, London, North Bay, Oakville, Sault Ste. Marie, St. Catharines, Southampton, and Warton. In addition, the majority of operating rooms in the following communities are closed the majority of the time (late afternoons, evenings, overnight and/or on weekends): Alliston, Almonte, Barrie, Bowmanville, Carleton Place, Collingwood, Cornwall, Kingston, Meaford, Nepean, Niagara Falls, Orillia, Oshawa, Ottawa, Pembroke, Peterborough, Toronto, and Welland.

In addition, the Coalition reports the Ford government has:

- Imposed real dollar cuts on public hospitals, pushing them into service closures and deficits, while funding for-profit hospitals and clinics with increases up to and over 300%. Ontario funds its public hospitals at the lowest rate of all provinces.
- Funded private for-profit hospitals at double the rate per surgery than it funds public hospitals.
- Funded private for-profit ophthalmology clinics across Ontario at 21% - 56% more for each cataract surgery.
- Refused to take action on the for-profit staffing agencies that are charging up to three times more than public hospitals for staff, having escalated their prices by more than 70% since Ford took office, while imposing wage caps and real dollar cuts on staff in public hospitals.
- Chronically underspent the health care budget, shunting billions to contingency fund and budget surplus, while leaving hospitals in unprecedented crisis.

“Hundreds of millions of dollars in public money is being used to dismantle and privatize our public hospitals, robbing the public to build the private,” said Natalie Mehra, executive director of the Ontario Health Coalition. “A few for-profit corporations are being enriched by the Ford government’s privatization scheme while our public hospitals and patients pay the price. It is beyond time that there is a rigorous investigation into who is benefitting from these policy choices and what their connections are to this government, because the costs and threats to our local public hospitals and the future of our single-tier public health system are very real and urgent.”