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Attn: Assignment Editor/Newsroom

For Immediate Release

## **Ford Government Must Be Transparent About COVID-19 Outbreaks, Improve Public Access to Information: Health Coalition Releases Updated Reports on Outbreaks in Health & Non-Health Sectors**

Toronto – The Ontario Health Coalition, which has been tracking COVID-19 outbreaks since the beginning of the pandemic, released two new reports today tracking the trends in outbreaks to the end of August in health care settings and in non-health care industries. The Coalition has highlighted in each report the information that is either no longer reported by Public Health and the Ontario government, or has not been reported at all, but should be. The reports, *Tracking of COVID-19 Outbreaks in Health Care Settings* and *COVID-19 Outbreaks in Non-Healthcare Settings* are available on the Coalition’s website [here](#). Previous reports dating back to the first outbreaks in March are also posted.

“Key information that was previously reported regarding the spread of COVID-19 in health care settings has been discontinued without explanation,” reported Natalie Mehra, executive director of the Ontario Health Coalition. “In non-health care industries, no information is being reported to identify the names of businesses and services with outbreaks. This is unacceptable.”

In a recent example, 184 staff who worked at two bakeries owned by the same company in Toronto contracted COVID-19 and one staff person died in May. The outbreak was lifted June 24. The information was not revealed publicly until mid-August. The Health Coalition found a cumulative total of 1,685 confirmed cases among agricultural workers, and the numbers continue to rise, by far the highest number in any industry outside of health care, but the names of farms with outbreaks are not disclosed. There are 87 active outbreaks in what we consider to be workplaces, including retail stores and warehouses, farms, public services and other industries that are not health care settings. We were able to find only a portion of these. People need to know, for instance, when a workplace or public setting has had COVID-19 cases to help contain the spread.

“Public Health Units and the Ontario government have disclosed the names of long-term care homes and retirement homes with outbreaks, even listing the gender and age of the people infected. So how is it justifiable that other outbreaks in businesses and services are being hidden?”, Ms. Mehra asked, noting that some retail chains such as Metro and Loblaws have been openly and transparently reporting outbreaks in their stores and warehouses while others have tried to keep the information secret, and have been aided in doing so by the government’s failure to report openly.

“This is vital public information. Not only does it make the public aware of the transmission of COVID-19, helping to remind people to continue to use the infection control measures recommended by Public Health, but also it enables patrons and workers alike to take extra care when there are outbreaks which will help to contain the spread of the virus,” she added. “There is no public interest argument for keeping COVID-19 outbreaks secret. This is a case of putting business interests before the public interest and the government must start full and transparent reporting of outbreaks.”

In light of the return to school, the Coalition is calling for the government to make clear that the definition of an outbreak is one person in a workplace, industry, or service, and one person in a school. This matters, because when an outbreak is declared, outbreak protocols can be effected. In long-term care, once the definition of outbreak was

clarified to mean one person (staff or resident) and outbreak protocols were put in place it helped to begin to contain the spread of the novel coronavirus.

The Coalition is also calling for clear and transparent disclosure of the names of schools, workplaces, services and industries with outbreaks, and reporting on the number of cases in each outbreak, just as there has been in health care and congregate care facilities.

Finally, the Coalition is calling for the resumption of the reporting of details regarding outbreaks in health care settings as were reported prior to the beginning of June. The information is vital for researchers, advocates and the public to be able to see over time what the trends are regarding the spread of the virus. (Details of the information that is no longer reported are in the health care outbreaks report.)

Key findings in the Ontario Health Coalition's outbreaks reports released today:

In health care, the Coalition found 54 new outbreaks over the six weeks from mid-July to the end of August, up from 30 new outbreaks in the previous month. However, the outbreaks are smaller than they had been throughout the first wave, with fewer people infected, and the outbreaks have been resolved more quickly. Across health care settings, including long-term care, hospitals, retirement homes, clinics, public health units and other congregate care settings, the Coalition found that case numbers stopped declining and have instead flatlined over the last 6 weeks with 197 new people, including staff and patients/residents infected (1.7 percent growth in cases almost identical to the month before). The Coalition expressed deep sadness as it reported that it found 46 patients and residents who died as a result of COVID-19 over this period. Since the beginning of the pandemic, the Coalition has found a total of 762 outbreaks in 599 health care facilities including hospitals, long-term care, mental health and addictions facilities, retirement homes, clinics, public health units and other congregate care settings. Of these, the Coalition found that 669 have been resolved. The cumulative total of patients/residents infected that the Ontario Health Coalition has been able to track in health care settings is 7,011; cumulative total staff infected 4,512; cumulative total of residents/patients deceased is 2,172; cumulative total of staff deceased is 14; cumulative total of volunteers/family deceased is 2. Note: on September 2, Public Health Ontario reported the cumulative total of health care staff infected is 6,732 so we have not been able to find and track all of them. The Coalition has included a new section in the report on discontinued data that lists the changes in data reporting and the data that is no longer being reported by Public Health Ontario and the Ontario government.

The report on outbreaks in non-health care industries key findings:

Public Health Ontario reports that as of August 29 there are 87 active outbreaks in non-health care industries and a cumulative total of 520 outbreaks. (Note: Public Health Ontario does not count all of these as workplaces though a number of them are both services and workplaces.) The OHC has found 3,717 of these cumulative total cases in non-health care industries and has listed them by industry. The Coalition has found 1,685 cases among agricultural workers, the largest portion of total cases in any industry. The findings reveal significant increases in COVID-19 transmission in agriculture (up 34% in approximately six weeks from the cases that we could find); public services with an outbreak in Ottawa transit; retail where the virus continues to spread to new locations; developmental services, and; distressingly, we have seen new a few new outbreaks in summer camp settings. Ontario has also seen a continued rise in COVID-19 positive passengers arriving in Ontario during July and August, when flight providers were allowed to seat passengers in the middle seats in each row, which had previously been prohibited to allow for better social distancing. In July there were 37 flights that arrived in Ontario with COVID-positive passengers and in August there were at least 45 flights.