

For Immediate Release
Attn: Assignment Editor

April 8, 2008

Health Coalition Objects to Smitherman on Hospital Cuts: Demands Full Disclosure

Toronto – The Ontario Health Coalition reacted to George Smitherman’s characterization of hospital deficits this afternoon.

“It is a small consolation that the health minister has moved from denial to finally admitting that Ontario hospitals are in facing cuts,” noted Natalie Mehra, coalition director. “The cuts at Rouge Valley are just the tip of the iceberg. Seventy-five hospitals are projecting deficits this year and the situation is only going to worsen next year if the McGuinty government doesn’t start to listen. In addition to the cuts in the Toronto area, communities in Cornwall, Prince Edward County, Kingston, Niagara, Sault Ste. Marie, Sudbury, Strathroy and area should be paying particular attention.”

“This government is developing a track record of secrecy and failure to disclose important information to the public. Hospital officials have been intimidated into keeping the full picture of deficits and service cuts secret from their own communities. The only public consultation is occurring after cuts have been decided, and the McGuinty government is hiding behind the Local Health Integration Networks who are appointed by Cabinet and answer to the Health Minister,” she noted. “The government must come clean and disclose the full range of cuts being considered across Ontario. The current level of secrecy is indefensible.”

“Hospitals in Ontario have among the lowest per person funding in the country. Our hospitals have been subjected to more rigorous scrutiny of their budgets than any other sector. Hospitals have had peer review after peer review, consultants, inspectors, a host of checks and double checks. Independent consultants’ reports show that we have the most efficient hospitals in the country – with patients pushed through as fast as possible and significant movement of care out of hospitals.”

“The Minister’s claim that hospital cuts are a “necessary evil” just doesn’t hold water.”

“Not only is the government projecting a surplus in this year’s budget, this government has poured money into for-profit health care. Why is it, that when it comes to wasteful profit taking in for-profit nursing homes or a four-tier administrative burden propping up competitive bidding in homecare the government has no inclination to listen. But when it comes to our public hospitals the Health Minister is more than willing to play hardball with people’s access to care.”

For example:

- The McGuinty government has paid \$430 million in dividends (profits), management fees and higher interest rates for the provinces’ first P3 hospital in Brampton, Ontario. This is more than four times the total amount of money the Ontario Hospital Association has reported is required for all hospitals across Ontario. The McGuinty government has now announced more than 34 privatized P3 hospital projects which are mired in controversy over high costs and profit taking. The first five P3 hospitals in Ontario have gone more than \$1 billion over budget.
- The McGuinty government has given repeated flows of money to for-profit nursing homes without setting a regulated care standard to ensure money is actually spent on care. Several years ago, Extendicare reported publicly unprecedented profits from its Ontario and Alberta operations.

The coalition has posted a deficit “hot spot” map and listing of hospital deficits in our budget release at: www.ontariohealthcoalition.ca .

For more information: 416-230-6402 (cell) 416-441-2502 (office)