

Thousands Join Rally at Ontario Legislature to Stop Hospital Cuts



At Queen's Park on April 29, a bagpiper greets thousands of protesters calling for a stop to local hospital cuts. Photo gallery on next page.

More than 3,000 people came by bus, car pool and public transit to the front lawn of Queen's Park to demand that McGuinty stop the cuts and closures of local hospitals across Ontario. Small and rural communities were particularly visible with people carrying messages from Wallaceburg, Fort Erie, Port Colborne, Welland, Niagara Falls, Strathroy, Petrolia, Burk's Falls, Kincardine, Quinte West, Picton and other towns. Larger communities also facing cuts such as Hamilton, Guelph, Cambridge and Toronto were also well represented.

Mayors from small and rural communities across Ontario convened a press conference at Queen's Park during the protest to announce the formation of an alliance of municipalities working to protect their local hospitals. Liberal MPP Kim Craitor from Niagara Falls, where birthing is slated to be cut, sponsored the media studio. Opposition MPPs from the Conservative and NDP parties peppered the Health Minister with questions during Question Period, then joined protesters outside where leaders and health critics from both parties spoke to the assembled crowd.

The Minister of Health responded by announcing a Task Force to look into rural health. There is, however, no promise to save the services that have been or are being cut and it is not clear who is on this Task Force, nor what its mandate and timelines will be.

Finally forced to respond in the media, the Premier betrayed his lack of understanding of the issues by stating that he had received advice that cutting local Emergency Departments and creating "Centres of Excellence" would provide better care. Aside from the obvious problems of inadequate transportation and impassable roads, not to mention thousands of patients descending on the remaining ERs without the funding or staff to provide them with care, this is a mis-use of the notion of "Centres of Excellence". However, this government and the LHINs have started to use the term to cover just about any local service cut.

The Ontario Health Coalition is intensifying our campaign to save the services and hospitals. Next week, the Operating Rooms in Fort Erie are slated to be closed and the equipment moved out. In June and July respectively, Port Colborne is slated to close and Wallaceburg's inpatient beds are facing closure. Fort Erie is facing closure in September. Upcoming events and activities will be posted to our website within the next week and will be sent out by email. Please help by calling, faxing or emailing Premier McGuinty and your local MPP to call for a moratorium on hospital cuts and closures.

New Long-Term Care Homes Draft Regulations Released

June 5 Deadline for Input

On May 5, 2009 the McGuinty government started its required 30-day consultation period for written comments on the first set of draft regulations under the new Long-Term Care Homes Act (Bill 140). The Ministry of Health revealed that there will be a second set of draft regulations to be released for 30-day consultation period at a later date.

You can get the new draft regulations at:

http://www.health.gov.on.ca/english/public/legislation/ltc_homes/ltc_homes.html

The Ontario Health Coalition's response to the draft regulations will be sent out email and posted to our website by the end of the day on Friday, May 15, 2009 for your use.

Your comments and feedback need to be sent into the government by June 5, 2009 to the following address/

email:

**Ms. Colleen Sonnenberg
Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care
LTCHA Regulation Project
9th Floor, 56 Wellesley St. West,
Toronto, ON M7A 2J9
or by email to: LTCHAProject@ontario.ca**

The decision to approve the regulations will be made by cabinet. Once the two sets of regulations have been consulted upon for the 30-day consultation period, as the government is required to do, the Long Term Care Act will be proclaimed into force, complete with what will become the one final regulation.

Background

The Long Term Care Act (which was taken mostly from the former Nursing Homes Act) received Royal Assent on June 4, 2007.

Ontario has the most privatized for-profit long term care sector in Canada with more than 1/2 of the homes owned by for-profits. This sector is characterized by a vigorous and effective lobby by the owner/operators of the facilities. Generally, the for-profit industry has lobbied for more funding through increased accommodation fees for residents (in the funding envelope from which they can take profits) and increased funding from government on the one hand, and fewer strings attached to funding. Over the last two years, this lobby has explicitly targetted the number of regulations that facilities must follow.

There has been some high-level staff exchanged between the for-profit industry and the Ministry of Health and Cabinet Office.

In general, the public interest groups have pushed for improved care levels; appropriate levels of care and facilities for those with behavioural issues and cognitive impairment and a stop to the downloading of patients that are too complex for the levels of care provided in ltc facilities; real whistleblower protection; more transparency and public reporting of actual care levels; and improved complaints, inspection and enforcement regimes. *continued next pg>*

