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**MCGUINTY GOVERNMENT STRENGTHENS ROLE OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES IN  
HEALTH CARE DECISIONS**

*New Act Will Mean Better Coordinated Health Care Services For Ontarians*

TORONTO – The McGuinty government is strengthening Ontario’s health care system and responding to local health care needs by providing Local Health Integration Networks (LHINs) with new powers through legislation, which received third and final reading today, said Health and Long-Term Care Minister George Smitherman.

“Our government is building a health care system around the needs of communities and patients,” Smitherman said. “This legislation will allow important health care decisions to be made at the community level by people who best understand the needs and priorities of community. We’re moving toward a system that is better planned, coordinated and accountable.”

After receiving Royal Assent, the Local Health System Integration Act, 2006, will give the 14 LHINs in the province the power to plan, integrate and fund local health services – including hospitals, Community Care Access Centres, Community Health Centres, as well as home care, long-term care, mental health, addiction and community support services – for their specific geographic areas.

“The Council of Academic Hospitals of Ontario (CAHO) supports the implementation of this meaningful and needed reform,” said Dr. Jack Kitts, president of CAHO and The Ottawa Hospital. “LHINs will define Ontario’s social landscape and enable changes on the ground, where patients receive care from Ontario’s high-quality health providers.”

The networks will allow local communities and health care providers to work together to identify local priorities, plan health services and deliver them in a more coordinated fashion. The government would continue to set strategic directions and provincial standards for high-quality, accessible health care.

“LHINs will break down the barriers faced by patients trying to find the health care services they need because those services will be better coordinated,” Smitherman said.

The minister also noted that the final version of the act includes a number of amendments.

“We’ve listened to organizations and individuals who have asked for changes to the legislation,” Smitherman said. “We’ve responded with a number of amendments that clearly improve the Local Health System Integration Act.”

This initiative is part of the McGuinty government’s plan to build a health care system that delivers on three priorities – keeping Ontarians healthy, reducing wait times and providing better access to doctors and nurses.

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