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MCGUINTY GOVERNMENT MOVES TO SHORTEN ER WAIT TIMES

Enhanced Community and Hospital Resources, Improved Physician Compensation Models Among Initiatives

TORONTO - The McGuinty government is providing a comprehensive response to the challenges faced by emergency rooms, committing over \$142 million in new resources through a three-point Emergency Department Action Plan, Health and Long-Term Care Minister George Smitherman announced today.

“The McGuinty government recognizes that hospital emergency departments do not operate in isolation from our health care system,” said Smitherman. “Today’s announcement will not only help ensure emergency rooms stay open, but reflects our belief that building capacity in the health care system will address many of the challenges facing emergency departments and allow them to respond effectively and efficiently to patient needs.”

The government has completed a successful negotiation with Ontario doctors that will see better emergency room coverage with a particular focus on weekend, holiday and seasonal adjustments.

The \$142.4 million Emergency Department Action Plan contains system-wide solutions to ensure emergency rooms stay open and the health care system has increased capacity to meet the needs of Ontario patients. The three-point plan includes:

- \$13.2 million to retain and recruit emergency room physicians and launch pilot projects to add physician assistants and nurse practitioners to emergency rooms.
- \$76.8 million to create a “Better Access to Emergency Care Fund”, which will reduce emergency room waiting times and improve working conditions for frontline health care workers; enhance critical care capacity in hospitals; and provide \$10 million for small and rural hospitals and \$30 million to hospitals in areas of high population growth to improve their capacity.
- \$52.4 million to support current community-based services and provide more services in the community.

The plan also includes the construction of 1,750 new and the replacement of 662 long-term care beds.

“Pressures on our hospitals and emergency rooms have been ongoing challenges for some time,” said Smitherman. “The strategy I am announcing today will put our health care system on a better path to provide timely and responsive services to Ontarians.”

Today's announcement builds upon recommendations contained in the *Improving Access to Emergency Care: Addressing System Issues* report, prepared by a joint committee of the Ontario Hospital Association, the Ontario Medical Association and the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care which was released on October 2, 2006.

Responding to the *Improving Access to Emergency Care* report, the McGuinty government has already:

- Launched a health care infrastructure plan that will add 2,000 new hospital beds, including 400 in 2007.
- Invested more than \$90 million in a comprehensive critical care strategy that includes the addition of more Intensive Care Unit beds across the province.

Today's initiative is part of the McGuinty government's plan for innovation in public health care, building a system that delivers on three priorities - keeping Ontarians healthy, reducing wait times and providing better access to doctors and nurses.

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Att: Backgrounder