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MCGUINTY GOVERNMENT'S RESULTS SHOWS THAT PUBLIC HEALTH CARE SYSTEM CAN DELIVER

But Minister Warns That Canada's Public Health Care System Faces A Very Real Threat

TORONTO – The McGuinty government's plan for equitable access to health care shows there's a viable future for the public health care system against the increasing threat of privatization, Health and Long-Term Care Minister George Smitherman said today.

"I believe the public health care system that most Canadians cherish is under threat – a very real, very tangible threat," Smitherman said in a speech to the Economic Club of Toronto. "This is our public health care system and we have to start fighting for it."

Smitherman said the election of Dr. Brian Day, who runs a private surgery clinic and openly advocates private health care, as the new president of the Canadian Medical Association represents the latest threat to public health care in Canada.

"Canadians have a choice between the two-tier health care approach that provides better access to those who can pay, or the approach that Ontario's health care system is taking, Smitherman said. "The Ontario option is about strengthening the public system and it's working. There is continuous quality improvement that the people of Ontario can see, in the form of results that they can measure. Our progress shows that the public health care system can deliver better access for all Ontarians."

The Minister said Ontario has a plan for innovation in public health care, building a system that delivers on three priorities – providing better access to doctors and nurses, reducing wait times and keeping Ontarians healthy.

The McGuinty government has made great strides in improving access to doctors and nurses. Recent government innovations include:

- The creation of 4,299 new nursing jobs
- Increasing medical school enrolment by 23 per cent
- 750 new foreign-trained doctors are practising in Ontario and approximately another 470 are currently enrolled in ministry-funded training and assessment programs
- Having 6.6 million people – more than half the province – enrolled in some form of group practice model – thanks in part to the creation of 150 Family Health Teams and 49 Community Health Centres (CHCs) and satellite CHCs
- Establishing HealthForceOntario to further increase the number of nurses, doctors and other health care professionals.

Ontario has taken a leadership role in reducing wait times in Canada over the last three years by:

- Investing nearly half a billion dollars to fund about 530,000 new procedures in five key areas – cancer surgery, cardiac procedures, cataract surgery, hip and knee joint replacements, and MRI/CT scans
- Decreasing wait times – such as a 25-day reduction for angiography, a 34-day reduction for cataract surgery, and a 29-day reduction for MRI scans
- Creating a public website that provides information on wait times in hospitals across the province (with more than a million hits so far).

The government has also introduced a number of initiatives to keep Ontarians healthy, including:

- Launching the most comprehensive newborn screening program in Canada
- Adding three new vaccines to the children’s immunization program
- Creating a \$10-million action plan to promote healthy eating and active living
- Developing the Smoke-Free Ontario Strategy, the most comprehensive smoking cessation program in North America
- Passing the *Smoke-Free Ontario Act*, which has made enclosed public spaces and workplaces 100 per cent smoke free throughout Ontario.

-30-

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