

Ontario Health Coalition

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For Immediate Release

Attn: Assignment Editor

McGuinty Government Local Hospital Emergency Department Closures Put Patients at Risk: New Ontario Health Coalition Survey of Paramedics Across Ontario

The Ontario Health Coalition released a new report today, "Putting Patients at Risk". Based on in-depth interviews with more than 50 paramedics in every geographic region of Ontario, the report summarizes the impact on patient outcomes and ambulance services of closing small and rural hospital emergency departments. A summary and the report are available at www.ontariohealthcoalition.ca.

The McGuinty government is pursuing plans to close down emergency departments in small, medium and even large hospitals across Ontario, despite election promises to improve ER access. At least 70% of Ontario's hospitals have been pushed into deficit as a result of provincial government funding levels that are less than the rate of inflation. At risk are hospital emergency departments in Petrolia, Wallaceburg, Fort Erie, Port Colborne, St. Joseph Island, Trenton, Picton, Hamilton, Durham, Wellington County and others. According to paramedics across Ontario, these closures will likely result in new costs, less access to ambulances as they are forced to drive patients further to get to an ER, and longer offload delays in the overcrowded hospital emergency rooms that remain.

"Every paramedic in every geographic region of Ontario expressed serious concerns about local emergency department closures," noted Natalie Mehra, Director of the Ontario Health Coalition and the report's author. "Paramedics used very strong language – calling these plans "absurd". They told us that the consequences of closing local emergency rooms will longer delays, worse outcomes and even higher death rates for patients."

Key Findings

- Every paramedic expressed concerns about the closures of local emergency departments.
- Every paramedic we interviewed stated that ambulances cannot replace the functions provided in local hospitals' emergency departments, including drugs for heart attacks, blood for traumas, and a host of other emergency care.
- Every paramedic gave concrete examples of how the plan to close local Emergency Departments will increase risks for patients, worsen wait times, deprive communities of access to care, or cause poorer care outcomes and even death.
- Most paramedics reported, from their experience, that the plan to close local emergency departments would lead to new costs for more ambulances, more paramedics and more training requirements. These have not been put in place in any area where the local ERs are under threat of closure.

"Claims by the McGuinty government and their LHINs that they are improving quality care are simply false cover for a misguided cost-cutting plan that imperils access to care for whole communities. There has not been any appropriate assessment of the impact of ER closures on patient outcomes and death rates. We are calling for an immediate moratorium on hospital closures," concluded Ms. Mehra.

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