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Privatization of Health Care**

**Vigorous Campaign to "Stop the Ford  
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Toronto rally for public health care, December 12, 2022

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## Ontarians Raise Their Voices Against Government's Privatization of Health Care

# Vigorous Campaign to "Stop the Ford Government From Privatizing Our Public Hospitals"



Rally against privatization of hospitals in Windsor, December 12, 2022.

The Ontario Health Coalition (OHC) organized rallies in Ottawa and Niagara on December 9 and in Toronto, Kitchener-Waterloo and Windsor on December 12 as part of their campaign to stop the Ford government's privatization of hospitals. The actions rallied public support and appreciation for the doctors, nurses and other frontline health care workers in Ontario who have carried on courageously to serve the people of Ontario despite an unprecedented health care crisis in the province.

Speakers at the actions highlighted the consequences of the massive cuts to health care carried out over the last three decades as a result of the restructuring of the state and privatization of the public sector. They denounced the particularly vicious attacks by the Ford government in cutting funds to public health care, attacking frontline health care workers, and privatizing more and more health care services.



In the weeks before these actions hundreds of people participated in a dozen virtual town hall meetings organized by the Ontario Health Coalition (OHC) in cities throughout Ontario. Another series of town hall meetings will be held in the New Year.

At the town halls local activists in the communities and representatives of the Ontario Health Coalition discussed practical actions, local and province-wide, to force the government to stop its aggressive agenda to cut back on public health care in favour of shifting work to private for profit operations. The main focus of the discussion was on hospitals which have been hard hit by government policies including Bill 124 which has imposed intolerable working conditions on hospital staff and pushed the staffing crisis to unprecedented levels.





At the Hamilton town hall on December 1 a member of the board of the OHC and representatives of the Ontario Council of Hospital Unions-CUPE and the Ontario Nurses' Association and local activists gave various examples of the consequences, including the temporary closure of almost 100 Emergency Departments and the closures of Intensive Care Units and Birthing Units due to lack of staff, patients stuck in Emergency Departments because there are no beds to admit them, communities without ambulance service because paramedics have to wait with their patients until

their care is taken over by hospital staff.

Several speakers denounced the cavalier attitude of the government including statements by the Minister of Health that ER closures and staff shortages are all "planned" and do not constitute any sort of emergency. Ontario Health, a government agency, has also said that hospitals are expected to remain at 120 per cent capacity until at least March.

In recent weeks children's hospitals have been overwhelmed and forced to cut services, hold children and families for hours before children can be admitted and transfer children to adult hospitals. In Hamilton a severely burned child had to be taken to hospital in London because the McMaster Children's Hospital could not treat him.

The spirit of the discussion reflected a determination to stop the Ford agenda of wrecking public health care by massive mobilization of workers, retirees, patients and families in communities all across the province, with conviction that the government's plan to privatize more and more of the public health care system can be defeated. Examples were given of past successful campaigns by people in large and small communities to stop plans to close departments or whole hospitals, and to stop the privatization of cancer care and ambulance services.



The Ontario Health Coalition has launched an ambitious campaign which includes the town halls and protests as well as a broad social media appeal to people to sign up as a Public Medicare Defender, a form of a petition to the government which has a target of a million names, "to tell Doug Ford in no uncertain terms that he does not have a mandate from Ontarians to privatize our public health care."

To join the campaign and for further information on upcoming events [click here](#).

(Photos: TMLD, ONA, OHC )



## Toronto Rally Defends Public Health Care



**Bernie Robinson, Interim President of the Ontario Nurses' Association speaks at Toronto health care rally, December 12, 2022.**

As part of the campaign by the Ontario Health Coalition in defence of public health care a rally was held in Toronto on December 12.



Natalie Mehra, the Executive Director of the OHC, welcomed people to the Toronto rally and began by denouncing the refusal of the Ford Conservative government to even acknowledge the health care crisis, let alone to do their duty to the people of Ontario who depend on the public health care system. Mehra highlighted that there have been more than 100 emergency room closures across Ontario and there has been a massive loss of frontline nurses and other health care workers due to the working conditions. She pointed out that more than 40,000 frontline health care workers are needed in hospitals, and 56,000 long term care staff to fill the shortages. She called on all Ontarians to continue standing with the health care workers and to defend the public health care system that is under attack by the Ford Conservatives.

Emergency physician Dr. Raghu Venugopal said that the determined fight of health care workers is for basic human dignity and for a properly functioning public health care system that meets the needs of Ontarians. Dr. Venugopal shared his harrowing frontline experience looking after patients at the Toronto General Hospital including elderly patients who have to wait hours and even days for care, in wheelchairs and in hallways. He also pointed out that as a result of the cuts to social programs, the number of homeless and mentally ill patients has increased and the staff and resources are so stretched that the nurses and other front line staff cannot properly address their complex needs.

Dr. Venugopal also spoke about the increasing incidents of violence against nurses and other workers in the conditions of a deteriorating health care system that has been pushed beyond its



capacity. He praised the nurses in particular for their high level of social responsibility stating "Without nurses, you have nothing."



Bernie Robinson, registered nurse and Interim President of the Ontario Nurses' Association also spoke at the action to share the immense challenges that underfunding and privatization have created. She pointed out that for years, and particularly since the pandemic, nurses have been telling governments about the damage to public health caused through privatization, and made serious proposals to address these in a way that defends a publicly funded and well-resourced health care system. Government has not listened and the Ford government is busy privatizing more and more services to serve the rich. She noted that nurses' working conditions are so untenable that many are leaving to work for private agencies. The government pays the private agency the equivalent of three to four times the base salaries of the highest paid nurses in the public sector. This has to stop, Robinson noted, calling for the removal of the Doug Ford Conservatives from office.

J.P. Hornick, president of the Ontario Public Sector Employees' Union (OPSEU/SEFPO) pointed out that the privatization of health care in Ontario must be ended. She noted that her union, the organized labour movement, and the people of Ontario are solidly behind the struggle of health care workers for their rights including the right to wages and working conditions that they deem acceptable. She also pointed out, as an example of the health care crisis, the use of Red Cross personnel to staff the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario because of staff shortages. She further decried the attacks of the Ford government on the labour movement and affirmed that workers will not back down in their fight.



Other speakers provided information on various aspects of the health care crisis, and pledged their support for the frontline nurses and health care workers. At the end, representatives of the Liberals and NDP at Queen's Park spoke, presenting themselves as the champions of public health care. They called on everyone to stand with the health

care workers as if for more than three decades the workers and people of Ontario have not united to resist the anti-social offensive of the narrow private interests which have usurped the state power, no matter which cartel party has implemented it -- NDP, Liberals or Conservatives.

The OHC called on everyone to join the campaign to be a "Medicare Defender" by signing up on the OHC website [here](#).



(Photos: TMLD)



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## Steelworkers Join Hamilton Nurses' Rally



On December 7 members of United Steelworkers (USW) Local 1005 joined members of the Ontario Nurses' Association in an information picket outside the Hamilton Health Sciences hospital.

The nurses are standing up to protect patient safety in opposition to the move by the hospital to replace nurses working as scrub nurses in the operating rooms with unregulated Operating Room Assistants (ORAs) who do not have the same specialized training. The nurses point out that all members of the health care team play an important role but there should be no cuts to the number of nurses in operating rooms.





(Photos: TMLD, ONA)



## Health Care Unions Demand Immediate Implementation of Solutions to Health Care Crisis



On November 24 Ontario's five largest health care unions held a joint press conference in which they appealed again to Premier Doug Ford and Health Minister Sylvia Jones to take immediate action to address the situation of staff shortages, burnt out nurses and other health care workers and closures of Emergency Rooms and other services across the province.

The unions are the Ontario Nurses' Association (ONA), the Ontario Council of Hospital Unions of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (OCHU-CUPE), the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU/SEFPO), Service Employees International Union (SEIU) -Healthcare, and Unifor.

The immediate actions the unions are calling for to solve the health care crisis are:

- Respect workers -- scrap Bill 124 and allow collective bargaining to determine wage rates to stabilize staffing levels.
- Boost frontline staffing -- provide responsive incentives to the current workforce, and return to work incentives for those who have left.
- Relieve administrative pressure -- hire new hospital support staff.
- Invest in people, not profit -- restrict the use of private health care staffing agencies.
- No privatization -- commit to invest all new funding in public hospitals.



In their joint statement the unions propose that the Premier meet with them to discuss a "meaningful, cohesive, and aggressive staff retention strategy" and point out that under the Premier's watch health care has been destabilized with staff turnover at 15 per cent. Ontario hospitals, they say, need to hire 47,000 staff. At the news conference they warned that "after several years of neglect, underfunding, and failure to improve staffing levels, the health system is now buckling under the weight of severe staff shortages, overcrowding, lack of surge capacity and the spread of COVID-19, a big and early surge in the flu and other respiratory illnesses."

They report that "In October, the five unions requested an urgent meeting with Premier Ford and Health Minister Jones to try to find a pathway to frontline-focused solutions. But after weeks with no response, the unions say that Doug Ford is openly ignoring frontline workers and patients, and actively pushing the public health care system to collapse, by doing as little as possible to sustain it." This at a time when the province has a \$2 billion surplus, "and billions more in unspent contingency funds and additional revenues." They estimate that it would cost \$2 billion to bring hospital staffing levels in Ontario up to the Canadian average.



Protest by health care workers in Stouffville, December 2, 2022, demands Ford government not appeal the court ruling striking down Bill 124.



The statement honed in on the concern that Ford is using the crisis to drive his privatization agenda and warned that "two-tier health delivery will make staffing shortages, wait times and patient outcomes even worse by competing for scarce staff and pulling them out of the public system, where wages have been cut."

Health care workers, their unions and community organizations throughout the province are making their demands and solutions public in order to mobilize public opinion to put pressure on the Ford government to invest in public health care, treat health care workers with dignity and respect and implement the solutions they have put forward.

## Union Leaders on Ontario Health Care Crisis



Below are excerpts from what was said at the November 24 press conference:

### **Michael Hurley, President Ontario Council of Hospital Unions (OCHU-CUPE):**

"The Minister of Health says closing 80 ERs over the summer and now the huge pressures at pediatric hospitals are not crises but planned events. On the one hand who would plan such system failures? And on the other hand, we know that this government is using the current weakness of the public hospital system against it to privatize the backlog of surgeries and diagnostics. That the Minister has not tabled a plan to deal with the hospital staffing crisis is deeply troubling."

### **Angela Preocanin, RN, First Vice-President, Ontario Nurses' Association (ONA):**

"We want people to remember that they have a voice, they have power, and they can stand with those of us providing care to demand action and a real plan from this government. Letting pediatric and adult patients suffer as the government claims it has no money to restore staffing of our public healthcare system while sitting on billions of unspent healthcare funding dollars is obscene. People must demand government fund the care they need and deserve. We are asking the government to work with us on solutions -- for the good of Ontarians now."

### **JP Hornick, President, Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU/SEFPO):**

"After years of political choices to underfund and understaff Ontario's public health care system,

patients, their families and workers across the entire arc of patient care are suffering the fallout, and they're fed up. ICUs are closing, MRI and CT machines are closing, and patient care is suffering — all because of short staffing. Frontline workers have solutions; we also know what our solidarity can accomplish - when workers, their unions, and the communities they are part of come together with a common goal and vision, we win. In the fight to save our public hospitals - and against American-style, for profit delivery - we won't back down."

**Jackie Walker, Nursing Division President, SEIU Healthcare:**

"Nobody is satisfied with a PC plan objectively contributing to worsening results across Ontario's health care system. It's not the workers' plan that's failing. What we see is Ford's failing plan. Once again, we're bringing the Premier actionable solutions from the frontline to fix the crisis of care. The provincial government can either choose our new plan informed by health care workers themselves, or he can import a U.S.-style privatization scheme where patients wait longer so private interests can profit more, by denying patients with pre-existing conditions access to universal care, just like at Shouldice Hospital. Ford promised to protect the Greenbelt, now he's paving it. Ford promised OHIP-only access, then forced seniors to use their credit card for a hospital bed. What's next?"

**Naureen Rizvi, Ontario Regional Director, Unifor:**

"Ontarians continue to struggle through this pandemic with long wait times in emergency rooms, crowded hospitals and delays for surgeries and procedures. Meanwhile, health care workers are burned out and staffing shortages continue to plague our system. The health care system is on life support, yet this government is sitting on their hands with no intention to fix it. Instead, Ford's plan is to let the system crumble and push for more private, for-profit providers to deliver services."

*(Photos: OCHU, ONA, SIEU)*



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## **Ontario Injured Workers' Rally Affirms Demands Workers' Comp Is a Right!**



The Ontario Network of Injured Workers Groups (ONIWG) rallied December 12 outside the Ministry of Labour in Toronto to firmly reiterate to the Ontario government the main demands of injured workers.



Members of ONIWG were joined in the action by many of their allies including members of the United Steelworkers, United Food and Commercial Workers, Workers United, the Ontario Federation of Labour, Toronto and York Region Labour Council, and a contingent from the Workers' Centre of CPC(M-L).

Wayne Harris, the Executive Vice-President of ONIWG and an injured construction trades worker, spoke on behalf of the organization. He spoke about his own experience of being injured and dealing with the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) to bring forward the main demands of ONIWG's *Workers' Comp Is a Right!* campaign. He highlighted in particular the demand that WSIB must listen to injured workers' treating physicians. The "paper doctors" used by WSIB to assess workers' claims make their decisions without even meeting claimants, and thus cannot fulfill the duty of care doctors are required to provide, he noted. He also emphasized the need to end the WSIB's practice of reducing injured workers' benefits based on "deeming" that they are receiving earnings from a job which they do not have.



Wayne announced that on December 13 ONIWG was launching a court action challenging the WSIB's miscalculations of the cost of living adjustment injured workers are to receive this year. They have calculated it to be 2.2 per cent when in fact it is 4.7 per cent. In addition injured workers are demanding that the Ford government keep the commitment made during the 2022 election to increase injured workers' loss of earnings benefits to 90 per cent of their pre-injury income.

OFL Executive Vice President Janice Folk-Dawson brought the organization's greetings to the rally. She pointed out that workers cannot rely on the government or the WSIB to fix the problems with the compensation system and must instead rely on their own work and mobilization. She announced that the OFL is launching an "Enough Is Enough!" campaign which, among other things, is demanding increases to the Ontario Disabilities Support Program and Ontario Works and demanding that the corporations and banks "pay their due."

The rally also heard from representatives of the Toronto and York District Labour Council and the United Steelworkers. MPP Wayne Gates spoke about his private members' bill (Bill 57) calling for the end to deeming which was just re-introduced in the legislature.



The final speaker of the day was Mohamed, a migrant worker, speaking from Injured Workers' Action for Justice. He pointed out that migrant workers come to Canada to do hard, dirty and dangerous work, and worked these jobs throughout the pandemic. While other workers were given bonuses or raises during the pandemic in consideration of the dangerous conditions they worked in, migrant workers continued to make minimum wage. Citing his own example, that he has worked here for over five years without seeing his family, he spoke about the very difficult situation faced by migrant

workers and the toll it takes on their families, made that much worse if the worker is injured on the

job.

If a migrant worker is injured on the job they are sent home. Here we work to provide food, he said, but if injured we cannot afford to feed ourselves and our families. The situation of migrant workers makes the WSIB's policy of deeming all the more dastardly, and farcical, when they reduce a workers' WSIB benefits based on a job they are supposedly doing in Ontario, when in fact they are home in Jamaica or in some other country. "We demand the government take up its responsibility to injured workers -- *Full Justice! No Half Measures!*" he concluded.

The rally ended with a performance by ONIWG's skit troupe the Malingerers dealing with the refusal of WSIB to listen to injured workers' treating physicians and the hardships this causes as workers are forced to keep working without proper treatment for their injury.

Organizers encouraged participants to join the action against privatization of health care taking place nearby following the rally, very aware of the importance of the public health care system to injured workers, as it is to everyone in Ontario.

After the rally ended Wayne Harris delivered hundreds of signed letters from injured workers and their allies reiterating ONIWG's basic demands for action to the Acting Deputy Minister of Labour.



(Photos: TMLD)



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