

2013 Ontario Budget: Highlights for FHTs

When it comes to health care, the key planks in the 2013 Ontario budget are Health Links, the Seniors' Strategy and the recently announced funding increases for home care. The health care sections of the budget summarize government priorities and commitments in this area. Health-related excerpts from the budget appear below.

Full text of the budget can be downloaded at

http://www.fin.gov.on.ca/en/budget/ontariobudgets/2013/papers_all.html

Making Healthy Change Happen

- The government will continue to move forward with its Action Plan for Health Care to transform the health care system, provide better value for money, improve patient care and manage the average annual rate of growth in health care spending to two per cent over the medium term.
- The creation of 23 Health Links across the province will strengthen the coordination of care for high-needs patients, helping to reduce unnecessary hospital visits and readmission rates.
- The government is investing in more health care services in the community, including over \$700 million by 2015–16, to continue to reduce wait times for home care and provide the people of Ontario with more options that are available closer to home.

Improving Health Care for All

The government is committed to ensuring all the people in this province have access to the same high-quality health care services. To achieve this goal, the government is focused on implementing measures that help meet the unique health care needs of patients across Ontario, including:

- investing \$20 million annually to help small and rural hospitals improve patient care and transform their organizations. The government is supporting these hospitals in their role of delivering critical health care services within their local communities;
- launching Ontario's Action Plan for Seniors to provide better access to health care, quality resources, and improved safety and security for Ontario's seniors. The Plan, which builds on recommendations from Dr. Samir Sinha's report, "Living Longer, Living Well," draws on new and existing government programs to ensure seniors and their caregivers have access to the services they need, when and where they need them. This includes new supports for long-term care homes and matching a primary care provider with every Ontario senior who wants one;
- moving forward with the Comprehensive Mental Health and Addictions Strategy, focused to date on children and youth, with funding growing to \$93 million per year by 2013–14. The government will build on this Strategy over the coming year to expand and improve services for adults as well as youth. In addition, the government continues to support mental health and addiction services across the province, including early intervention, community-based counselling, employment training, supportive housing, residential treatment, and prevention of and treatment for substance abuse and problem gambling; and
- working with First Nation communities to increase access to care and community supports for those addicted to prescription narcotics. The government is investing in five new Community Wellness Development Teams with mental health and addictions expertise, blending traditional

and cultural practices. The investment will also support the use of telemedicine equipment to allow providers to conference with patients in remote communities.

Making Healthy Change Happen

The government's goal remains to make Ontario the healthiest place in North America to grow up and grow old. Providing the people of this province with access to high-quality, publicly funded health care services contributes to Ontario's overall productivity and quality of life.

Since launching Ontario's Action Plan for Health Care in January 2012, the government has made significant progress in transforming health care services to create a more sustainable, high-quality health care system to manage the growth in health care expenditures. Health care needs to be protected and strengthened so that it is there for future generations.

Patients come first in Ontario's health care system and the government will continue to work with health care partners to build a quality health care system that is responsive to patients and delivers better value for its health care investments.

Better Care, Better Value for Money

The Action Plan is the road map to transform the health care system to improve patient care, provide better value for money, and help manage the rate of growth in health care spending to an annual average of two per cent over the medium term. Significant progress has been made in moving ahead with this Plan. Actions include:

- strengthening the coordination of care for high-needs patients — five per cent of the population that accounts for two-thirds of health care costs — through the creation of 23 Health Links to date. By encouraging greater collaboration among health care providers, Health Links will help reduce unnecessary hospital visits and readmission rates. The goal over time is to expand Health Links across the province;
- encouraging more efficient delivery of services and treatments through a transparent, patient-centred funding model in hospitals;
- shifting routine procedures conducted in hospitals to specialized not-for-profit community clinics. These clinics can serve more patients more quickly and at a lower cost, while achieving excellent patient outcomes. The government is planning to shift a range of routine procedures, including colonoscopies, dialysis, and vision care;
- continuing to direct funding to where evidence shows the greatest value and where it improves quality and access to medically necessary services;
- continuing efforts to control drug expenditures — which are saving over \$500 million annually — through measures such as reducing the price the government pays for top generic drugs and substituting more brand-name drugs with generics that are equally effective;
- improving fairness in the Ontario Drug Benefit (ODB) program by asking higher-income senior ODB recipients to pay a larger share of their prescription drug costs starting in August 2014;
- investing \$15 million over three years, starting in 2013–14, to accelerate the conversion of remaining red-and-white Ontario Health Insurance Plan cards to the more secure photo cards. The full conversion is expected to be completed by 2018, supporting a reduction in fraud in the health care system;

- continuing to hold growth in hospitals' overall base operating funding to zero per cent in 2013–14. This is critical to managing health care expenditures, as funding to hospitals is the largest area of health spending;
- negotiating and implementing a new Physician Services Agreement with the Ontario Medical Association. The agreement, which runs to March 2014, will help manage health spending and allow for reinvestments into better care for the people of Ontario, including adding 30,000 more house calls for seniors and others with complex conditions; and
- modernizing the delivery of health care and lowering wait times through e-consultations that will enable patients to communicate with their doctor more easily, allowing for more virtual connections between family doctors and specialists, and an expansion of telemedicine services.

Improving Timely Access to Home and Community Care

Providing the right care, at the right time, in the right place is a key pillar of the Action Plan. This involves focusing resources to where they have the greatest health care benefit, while ensuring patients are treated in the most appropriate setting, in a timely manner, and at home whenever possible.

The government is investing in more health care services in the home and in the community, so that more options are available on a timely basis. This will help seniors and other people of this province live independently, in their communities and homes, for as long as possible.

In the *2012 Budget*, the Province made a commitment to increasing investment in home and community care services by an average of four per cent per year. The government is building on this commitment by providing an additional one per cent per year to increase overall funding for home and community care services by an average of over five per cent annually over the next three years. Investments in these services would increase by over \$700 million by 2015–16 above 2012–13 investments, including \$260 million in 2013–14.

The government will be investing to reduce home care wait times for nursing services and improve personal support services for clients with complex care needs. All clients requiring nursing services, including hospital and community referrals, will be targeted to receive service within five days of Community Care Access Centre (CCAC) assessment. For complex care clients, referred by either community clinics or hospitals, in need of personal support services, the target will be first service within five days of CCAC assessment.

Other initiatives already underway to improve and enhance home and community care include:

- providing three million more hours of personal support-worker care that will improve the quality of life for 90,000 more seniors;
- implementing key recommendations from Dr. Samir Sinha's report — "Living Longer, Living Well" — to help seniors stay healthy and live at home longer, including adding 250 short-stay beds in long-term care homes to help up to 1,500 more seniors get out of hospital sooner. The government is committed to moving forward with additional recommendations from Dr. Sinha's report over the coming year;
- providing long-term care homes with a two per cent annual increase in funding for direct resident care to address the increasingly complex care needs of patients;

- creating 23 Health Links across the province to date to encourage greater collaboration and coordination by a patient's different health care providers, ensuring high-needs patients, such as seniors and people with complex conditions, receive more responsive care in the right place; and
- continuing to provide the Healthy Homes Renovation Tax Credit to assist with the cost of home modifications to improve accessibility, functionality and mobility for seniors living at home, so they can live independently for as long as possible.

By ensuring the people of Ontario receive the care they need closer to home and when they need it, the government is better meeting patients' needs and managing health care costs. Care in the community and at home is more affordable than care in hospitals or long-term care homes.

Keeping Ontario Healthy

The government is continuing its focus on wellness and health promotion initiatives to help the people of this province stay healthy and productive, while also reducing future costs associated with preventable illnesses. These include:

- releasing recommendations by the Healthy Kids Panel — a group of experts assembled by the government to provide advice on how best to reduce childhood obesity by 20 per cent over five years;
- providing an additional \$5 million annual investment in the Smoke-Free Ontario Strategy to support the 2012 Budget objective of achieving the lowest smoking rate in Canada. The new funding will help more people quit smoking;
- introducing legislation to prohibit the sale of tanning services to youth under the age of 18 and advertising and marketing directed at them. This will help reduce the risk of skin cancer — the most common form of cancer — as exposure to tanning beds before the age of 35 increases the risk of melanoma by 75 per cent; and
- providing better tools for cervical, breast and colorectal cancer screening, including screening reminders, and linking the people of this province who are at high risk to the appropriate screening programs, prevention supports and genetic testing.

Faster Access to Care

Providing faster access to health care services helps ensure that the people of Ontario receive the care they need when they need it and reduces pressure on other parts of the health care system. That is why the government is:

- allowing pharmacists to administer the influenza vaccine to people over the age of five. This will enhance access to the vaccine, while also reducing potential future health care costs by preventing more serious and costly illnesses;
- creating two new birth centres, led by midwives, to give expectant mothers with low-risk pregnancies more choice in where they deliver their babies. The centres, to be located in Toronto and Ottawa, will assist up to 1,000 births per year;
- continuing to find ways to maximize the full potential of nurse practitioners, including creating 26 Nurse Practitioner-Led Clinics that will serve over 40,000 patients who did not have a family care provider; and

- improving waitlists by expanding services at the Kensington Eye Institute, including glaucoma and retina surgery and cornea transplants, with approximately 300 cornea transplants being conducted each year, and moving forward with a province-wide expansion of specialized clinics for vision care.

Actions to Eliminate the Deficit

The government's proven track record of beating its deficit targets is underpinned by concrete actions that will continue to generate results. Many of these actions stem from specific recommendations of the Commission on the Reform of Ontario's Public Services. Key actions include:

- Moving forward with a plan to transform public services by changing the way programs and services are delivered to give the people of Ontario better value for money and results. The government will continue to transform and modernize the delivery of programs and services in the most efficient and effective manner.
- Further integrating recommendations from the Commission on the Reform of Ontario's Public Services into government plans by continuing to move forward with 60 per cent of the recommendations this year, while continuing to study the remaining recommendations.
- Continuing to restrain compensation and achieve collective agreements that control public-sector compensation costs. All public-sector partners will need to continue to work together to effectively manage future compensation costs within Ontario's existing fiscal framework, which includes no funding for incremental compensation increases for new collective agreements. Ontario's recent public-sector settlements are below the average of those in the private sector, municipal sector and federal public sector.
- Reaching agreements with all four of the jointly sponsored pension plans (JSPPs) consolidated in the Province's financial statements to protect taxpayers from higher contributions while ensuring long-term sustainability of the plans.
- Slowing the growth rate of health care spending — currently 42 per cent of Provincial program spending — to an annual average of 2 per cent.
- The government will continue to move forward with its Action Plan to transform the health care system and provide better value for money.
- Income-testing of the Ontario Drug Benefit program, effective August 2014, that will require high-income seniors to pay a larger share of their prescription drug costs.