

2017 Ontario Budget – A Stronger, Healthier Ontario

An overview of the Ontario government budget

Overview

On Thursday, April 27th, the Liberal government released their 2017 Ontario Budget entitled "[A Stronger, Healthier Ontario](#)". This budget was the first balanced budget that was introduced by the Liberal government since 2008 and included a commitment to spend an additional \$11.5 billion in the healthcare sector over the next three years, with an overall increase in the health budget by 3.3 per cent. Additional spending was also announced in infrastructure, childcare and other social services. Here are some highlights of the budget that would be of interest to AFHTO members.

Primary Health Care:

Retention and Recruitment

For AFHTO members, the most important announcement was the new funding of \$145 million over three years to address recruitment and retention issues for interprofessional primary care teams. This new funding announced in the budget will mean \$73 million annualized by FY 2019-2020. Though not in the budget announcement last week, we also received written confirmation that there is an additional \$24M for 2020-21.

This means that with the announcement in 2016 of \$85 million plus the announcement of \$145 million in the 2017 budget, by 2020 interprofessional primary care teams will see a compensation increase of \$128.7 million annualized and that staff will see an annual increase each year for the next four years.

Here is the summary of increases

- FY 2016-17: \$22.2M (already in your base) = \$22.2M annualized
- FY 2017-18: \$9.5 M (from last year's budget) plus \$24.6 million: \$55.7M annualized
- FY 2018-19: Plus \$24.1 M for a total of \$80.4 M annualized
- FY 2019-20: Plus 24.3M for a total of \$104.7M annualized
- FY 2020-21: Plus \$24M for a total of \$128.7M annualized

This investment moves us very close to the campaign request for \$130 million for over 7,500 health care professionals working in over 400 interprofessional primary health care teams.

AOHC, AFHTO and NPAO will conduct a market refresh for 2017 rates to inform the allocation of these funds. The grassroots advocacy of our members in writing letters, sending in petitions, meeting with their MPPs and keeping the message front of mind with social media contributed heavily towards this investment and we thank everyone for participating in the campaign.

Expansion of Teams

The government also promises to expand access to interprofessional teams with \$15 million annualized investment in 2017 to create new or expand existing interprofessional teams so that all 76 sub regions across the province have a team. We have also been informed May 1, 2017 that this

amount will increase to \$43 million by 2018. We will be working with the Ministry to determine the criteria for this expansion and hope we can build on the successes of our member Family Health Teams and Nurse Practitioner-Led Clinics.

New Pharmacare Program: OHIP+

The centrepiece of the Ontario 2017 budget is the rollout of a new \$465 million youth pharmacare program for everyone 24 and under. Beginning January 1, 2018, all children and youth 24 years of age or younger will be able to get their prescription medications for free by simply showing their Ontario health card number and a prescription. Coverage will be automatic, with no upfront costs. Entitled OHIP+, the program will cover all common childhood prescriptions including the 4,400 drugs reimbursed under the Ontario Drug Benefit Program (including those under the Exceptional Access Program), at no cost.

Senior Health

The budget also indicates that drug access for seniors will be expanded with an additional 30,000 seniors eligible for the Seniors Co-Payment program due to an increase in the income threshold level.

The budget includes \$100 million over three years for the province's new dementia strategy, which will include helping patients and their caregivers find support, and improving training and education for health-care workers in dementia care.

The budget also includes an extra \$58 million for long-term care homes, a two-per-cent increase. Residents' food allowance will increase by six per cent, which comes after negative news reports that the province spends more per capita on food for inmates than seniors in long-term care. The budget also increases funding to Behavioural Supports Ontario by \$10 million, which will help long-term care homes handle patients with complex behavioural issues related to dementia.

Hospitals

The budget includes an increase of \$518 million in hospital funding, a three-per-cent boost. All hospitals will receive at minimal two percent increase.

Over the next 20 years, the province plans to provide more than \$20 billion in capital grants to hospitals. This includes \$9 billion for new major hospital projects. Newly approved major hospital projects include:

- Niagara Health System – New South Niagara Hospital Capital Project
- Windsor Regional Health Centre – New Greenfield Hospital Project
- Hamilton Health Sciences – Hamilton Redevelopment Project
- Trillium Health Partners – Broader Redevelopment Project
- Weeneebayko Area Health Authority – Hospital Replacement Project

And additional \$2.5 million planning grant was also provided for the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health.

Reducing Wait Times

In 2017, \$24 million in additional funding will be invested in new innovative models to ensure patients are receiving care in the most appropriate care settings possible – at home or in the

community. Announced was an investment of \$890 million over three years for key surgical services, such as foot, knee, hip and cataract surgeries, and other priority procedures. In addition an investment of \$245 million over three years in enhanced referral pathways for treatment of back pain and other bone and joint conditions, including using new digital tools like eReferrals and the expansion of a central intake system for each LHIN, was also announced.

Scope of Practice

Last week, the Government announced that Nurse Practitioners were able to prescribe controlled drugs and substances effective immediately. The budget included a notice to expand scope of practice for RNs to prescribe some medications. The government will continue to further expand the scope of practice for additional health providers in 2017.

Home and Community Care

Since 2013, the government has grown its investment in home and community care by about \$250 million a year, in addition to the province's ongoing funding of more than \$5 billion. An additional investment of \$85 million over three years will be made in home and community care programs, including home nursing, personal support and physiotherapy services, and a new Ontario Caregiver Tax Credit is being introduced. In addition, \$58 million, representing a 2% increase, will be invested in long term care. Starting in the fall of 2017, Ontario will also support more [education and training programs](#) to support caregivers.

Mental Health Care

Ontario already provides more than \$3.7 billion in ongoing funding for mental health and addiction services, including those for children and youth. In February 2017, the province announced an additional \$140 million over three years to advance the expansion of evidence-based mental health initiatives. In this upcoming year, \$73 million has been allocated over three years to provide greater access to a publicly-funded structured psychotherapy for anxiety and depression. Ontario is the first province in Canada to commit to a publicly-funded psychotherapy program.

Digital Health Care

In 2017, Ontario will release a 10-point plan for Digital Health in Ontario, investing \$15 million focused on opening up new ways for patients and families to access health information and services digitally.

Other Announcements

- An additional \$10 million of funding for the Northern Health Travel Grant Program to help cover medically related travel costs that residents of northern Ontario incur to access OHIP-insured health care services unavailable locally within a radius of 100 km.
- New infant hearing screen as part of the Newborn Screening Ontario program that will identify 100 babies per year who are affected by hearing loss and allow for earlier intervention and improved outcomes.
- Improved supports for premature babies and investment in Ontario's Human Donor Milk Bank and a new program to improve access to breast pumps for mothers of premature babies.
- In 2017, continue to grow Ontario's midwifery sector by up to 90 new midwives with the anticipation that 250 new midwives will be expected to enter the profession over the next

three years. Two new Indigenous midwives will be hired at the Dilico Family Health Team in Fort William First Nation to provide culturally appropriate child and maternity care for up to 30 Indigenous women and their children.

- Modernize the Smoke-Free Ontario Strategy in 2017 by continuing to provide free nicotine replacement products and invest in new smoking cessation programs. Tobacco tax rates will increase by \$10 per carton of cigarettes over the next three years.