



STRENGTHENING ONTARIO'S FUTURE BY INVESTING IN HEALTH CARE

March 25, 2008

Ontario's publicly funded health care system helps make the province attractive for businesses to invest and create jobs.

The government's plan is improving access, shortening wait times, promoting wellness, preventing illness and modernizing health infrastructure.

Investments in the health care sector have increased from \$29.4 billion in 2003-04 to a planned \$40.4 billion in 2008-09, rising to \$42.4 billion in 2009-10 and \$44.7 billion in 2010-11.

IMPROVING ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

More health care professionals

Through the 2008 Budget, the government is moving towards hiring 9,000 nurses by 2011-12, by investing more than \$500 million over three years in addition to making other investments. The government is increasing first-year medical school enrolment by 23 per cent between 2003-04 and 2008-09.

The government is investing \$90 million in 2008-09 to support full-time employment opportunities for nursing graduates. The government will also increase from 150 to 200 the number of student spaces for primary health care nurse practitioners and expand the number of undergraduate spaces for midwives from 60 to 90.

Better access to health care in rural, underserved areas

By investing \$53 million over the next three years, the government will create 50 more Family Health Teams by 2011-12. This Budget proposes to expand nurse practitioner-led clinics by providing \$38 million over three years. The government will also provide \$13 million in 2008-09 for enhancements to the Northern Health Travel Grant to help northerners access health care services.

Improving access to health care for seniors

The government will increase access for seniors through:

- Hiring 2,000 nurses for long-term care homes
- \$107 million over three years to move towards hiring 2,500 more personal support workers in long-term care homes
- \$278 million over three years to address various program needs in long-term care homes
- \$700 million over three years to continue the Aging at Home Strategy.

SHORTENING WAIT TIMES

This Budget is proposing to further reduce wait times to ensure that more Ontarians get the care they need, when they need it. This Budget invests:

- \$180 million over three years to create incentives to shorten emergency department wait times and improve patient satisfaction
- \$120 million over three years to assist hospitals in areas of high-population growth to meet anticipated demand
- \$64 million to expand general surgeries by 12,400 cases starting in 2008-09, rising to 30,000 surgeries in 2010-11
- \$17 million over three years to fund the operation of an additional five MRI machines, resulting in approximately 21,900 more scans
- \$20 million to support children with complex special needs, bringing total provincial spending on children's mental health to over \$440 million annually.

PROMOTING WELLNESS AND PREVENTING ILLNESS

This Budget proposes to build on the government's successful focus on active and healthy living, health promotion and illness prevention, by investing:

- \$154 million over three years to increase early detection and facilitate treatment of breast, cervical and colorectal cancers. Prostate-Specific Antigen (PSA) tests will also be covered for the first time as part of this investment and the human papillomavirus vaccination (HPV) program will be extended
- \$190 million over three years to implement a Chronic Disease Prevention and Management Strategy, starting with diabetes
- \$10 million annually in a childhood obesity strategy to encourage children to eat healthy and be physically active
- \$80 million over three years to improve mental health and addiction services.

The government is also:

- Proposing to make permanent the Retail Sales Tax exemption for qualifying nicotine replacement therapies
- Banning completely the display of tobacco products by May 31, 2008, as originally set out in the *Smoke-Free Ontario Act*
- Proposing legislation to ban smoking in cars where children are present, as announced in March 2008
- Proposing an extension until December 31, 2010 of the temporary Retail Sales Tax exemption for bicycles purchased for \$1,000 or less and related safety equipment
- Proposing Bill 8, the Healthy Food for Healthy Schools Act, 2007, that would make schools healthier by banning processed trans fats from food and beverages sold in school cafeterias and removing unhealthy food and beverages from school vending machines.

MODERNIZING HEALTH INFRASTRUCTURE

The government proposes to proceed with a number of health infrastructure projects in 2008, including:

- \$14 million in 2007-08 to 10 residential hospices across Ontario
- \$9 million to support the development of the new and expanded Ronald McDonald House in Toronto, which will provide support and more accommodation for families of seriously ill children from across Ontario who must travel for medical treatment
- \$47 million in 2008-09, growing to \$239 million in 2010-11, in e-health systems such as diagnostic imaging, drug and lab information, and a Diabetes Registry.

TAKING ACTION ON TOXIC SUBSTANCES

In the 2008 Budget, the government is making investments to protect Ontarians' health by taking action on toxic substances, including:

- \$41 million over four years to support the development of toxics legislation and a toxics reduction strategy that will require companies that emit toxic substances to reduce their emissions
- Working with Cancer Care Ontario and the Ontario Medical Association to identify, target and reduce the number of cancer-causing agents released in the environment.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Wait times for various key procedures are down since 2005:

- Cataract surgeries: wait time down 191 days or 61 per cent
- Angiography: wait time down 26 days or 47 per cent
- Knee replacements: wait time down 196 days or 45 per cent
- CT scans: wait time down 32 days or 40 per cent
- Hip replacements: wait time down 129 days or 37 per cent
- Angioplasty: wait time down nine days or 32 per cent
- Cancer surgeries: wait time down 12 days or 15 per cent
- MRI scans: wait time down seven days or six per cent
- Pediatric surgeries (since 2006): wait time down 14 days or five per cent.

Access to health care professionals has improved:

- More than 500,000 people who did not have a family doctor in 2003 now have one
- More than 8,000 nurses were hired between 2003 and 2008
- More than doubled the number of training and assessment positions for international medical graduates to 200 positions in 2004.

More health care services are available in the community:

- Introduced funding for residential hospices in up to 34 communities, part of the End-of-Life Care Strategy
- Increased the number of Community Health Centres (CHCs) to 76 from 54 and the number of satellite CHCs to 27 from 10, serving an additional 200,000 Ontarians.

To promote wellness and prevent illness, the government has:

- Implemented the Smoke-Free Ontario Strategy and developed an award-winning website, www.stupid.ca
- Launched Operation Health Protection to enhance Ontario's public health system
- Added, free of charge, three vaccines to the roster of recommended childhood vaccinations: Pneumococcal Conjugate, Varicella and Meningococcal C-Conjugate. This saves families about \$600 per child.

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