



Green Party of Ontario Health Care Strategy 2011

Authorized by the CFO of the Green Party of Ontario

Promoting access to quality, sustainable health care close to home

The Green Party believes in a sustainable, public health care system that provides every Ontarian with access to the quality health care they require, when and where they need it.

We all have first-hand experience with challenges in our current system, including long waits in emergency rooms, for specialists and tests, and for appropriate long-term care. Many of us also face the challenge of being unable to find a family doctor.

Adding to this is the growing sense of unease that health care spending is crowding out everything else the Ontario government must do, such as fund our education system, build and maintain roads and transit systems, and provide other community services. Currently, the health care budget is almost half of the provincial budget and if current trends continue, it will eat up 80% of the budget by 2030.

Like you, the Green Party has long been aware that our health system is facing unprecedented challenges. We are committed to ensuring that our public health care system not only works for today, but is sustainable for the next generation.

It's time to refocus our health care system on programs that will prevent illness in the first place while improving access and quality. The time to start is now, while we can still affect the outcome. We can create efficiencies, better manage costs, and improve outcomes by making front line health care more accessible.

The good news is that there are solutions for the best way forward. The real issue is that these solutions require political leadership, commitment and thinking that extends beyond the four-year election cycle. Green MPPs are committed to providing this leadership.



The Green Health Care plan establishes the following priorities:

1. **Make health promotion and illness prevention a top priority**
2. **Reform health care delivery to ensure all Ontarians have access to quality community health services in a family care clinic setting**
3. **Honour our seniors by improving the care available to Ontario's ageing population**

1. Prioritizing health promotion and illness prevention

Governments of the twenty first century cannot speak of improving health care without understanding and confronting the lifestyle and environmental issues facing us today. We know that a penny invested in preventing illness today saves a dollar tomorrow.

We must recognize that keeping Ontarians healthy is part and parcel of creating a sustainable, affordable health care system. Policies that promote and reward healthy lifestyles are essential to building a strong province.

Ontario only spends \$7 per person on health promotion and illness prevention. In comparison, British Columbia spends \$21 per person, and Québec spends \$16 per person.

It costs much less to keep people healthy than to treat illness. We need to refocus the system to concentrate on true health care, not just sick care.



Your Green MPPs will:

- Support the development of healthy, liveable, recreation-friendly communities.
- Ensure clean air, water and food.
- Provide incentives for people to pursue healthy lifestyles and support school-based nutrition, outdoor education and athletic programs.

Health promotion and illness prevention

We will support the development of healthy, liveable, recreation-friendly communities.

The most effective and affordable way of keeping people healthy is preventing illness from occurring in the first place. The link between nutrition, fitness and health is an important one, and Ontario needs political leadership to make these links a priority.

The Green Party will concentrate on improved planning and development strategies, including funding for active transportation initiatives, public transit and commuter benefits. This will help build communities that are healthier for us and for our environment.

Your Green MPPs will:

- Use powers of zoning and transportation planning to design communities that are safe and convenient for walking and cycling to school, work, shopping, entertainment, etc.
- Revise Ontario's growth plans to support more balanced population and job growth around the province and eliminate the population quotas that impose unsustainable and unaffordable growth on some municipalities.
- Create a \$200 million fund for active transportation and complete streets initiatives.
- Invest \$400 million in tax credits over four years for affordable commuter benefits that support ride sharing and car-pooling, flexible work, and a refundable provincial tax credit for transit users.
- Promote education regarding healthier lifestyles, including ensuring physical education is part of the curriculum for all children.
- Implement a rural school strategy, acknowledging the important role schools play as community hubs, especially in single school communities.
- Re-join the Ministry of Health Promotion and the Ministry of Health and Long Term care. We must integrate health promotion fully into our health care delivery system.
- Work with stakeholders to improve programs to discourage smoking, banning of flavoured tobacco products and smart regulations for tobacco retailers.



Health promotion and illness prevention

We will ensure clean air, water and food.

Ontario's air, land and water quality are essential to our health and well-being. We need to make the connections between strong, sustainable communities, air and water quality and their effects on hospital admissions.

It's unacceptable that asthma rates are twenty times higher today than they were twenty years ago. We need to bring forward legislation to help address the root causes of asthma and other respiratory diseases. Ontario is now a world leader in safe drinking water policy, but it should not have taken the Walkerton crisis to bring us to this point. We need a plan to address the over 100 boil water advisories in this province, and to manage our waste properly so it doesn't make us sick.

It's important to recognize that we can have clean air, water and food by making connections across traditionally separate domains. For example, the ways we create energy, grow food and manage our economy can make a huge difference in our health and well-being.

The Green Party is committed to making those connections, bringing improvements to our management of air, water and land to ensure that it remains clean and available for generations to come.

Your Green MPPs will:

- **Compensate farmers and landowners for environmental goods and services they provide that lead to clean air and water, by expanding the Alternative Land Use Services (ALUS) program. The ALUS program provides an incentive for farmers who provide public benefits that improve our health through stewardship of clean air and water, biodiversity and habitat preservation and carbon sequestration.**
- **Invest an additional \$285 million in a fund for municipalities to make water and sewage infrastructure improvements.**
- **Work to strengthen programs to clean up and protect the Great Lakes by supporting a Great Lakes Act, implementing the Great Lakes Charter Annex, working to strengthen the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement, and developing agreements with neighbouring jurisdictions to prevent invasive species.**
- **Support development of a green infrastructure strategy to ensure that our communities have natural spaces that reduce the cost of water treatment and flood water control and to keep our lakes and watersheds healthy.**
- **Revise the *Waste Diversion Act* to cover more materials and sectors and to shift costs from taxpayers to industry, through Extended Producer Responsibility legislation, in order to create incentives to reduce waste in the first place.**
- **Develop a plan to reduce air pollution, with a special focus on assisting communities already struggling with poor air quality.**
- **Revise the *Aggregate Resources Act* to create incentives for more efficient use of aggregates, aggregate recycling and stronger site rehabilitation efforts. Require a full Environmental Assessment for aggregate applications that meet the Ministry of Natural Resource's definition of a mega quarry (currently 150,000,000 tonnes). Support industry and NGO efforts to develop green gravel standards in Ontario.**

Health promotion and illness prevention

We will provide incentives for people to pursue healthy lifestyles and support school-based nutrition, outdoor education and athletic programs.

Studies continually show that healthy diets are vital for long-term well-being. By taking preventative measures to stay healthy, we are taking a load off the backs of care givers and health care workers throughout Ontario. Preventing illness frees up doctors, front-line staff and hospital beds and allows us to use our treatment resources more efficiently and effectively.



The Green Party will not impose healthier lifestyles on Ontarians, but rather will encourage healthier lifestyles through tax credits and other incentives, as well as educational programs. We would also encourage more use of health professions that focus on health promotion and on healthy lifestyles, such as physiotherapists, naturopaths, dieticians and nutritionists.

Ontario needs political leadership to connect the dots between access to healthy local sustainable food and the sustainability of our health care system. For this reason, the Green Party is calling for an Ontario Food and Farming Strategy to improve access to healthy local food for all Ontarians.

Part of this plan is to ensure that we do a better job of coordinating and supporting healthy food programs at schools. These programs can create a culture among the young, which values healthy living and healthy food choices. This helps achieve our goal to lower obesity rates and to prevent diseases such as diabetes.

Your Green MPPs will:

- Invest \$200 million over four years for a healthy school food program, and set purchasing targets for local sustainable food in public institutions.
- Invest \$200 million over four years for a good food program that invests in community food programs that promote access to healthy food, community gardens, cooking and nutrition classes.
- Provide \$200 million over four years in healthy living tax credits for children and adult recreation programs.

2. Reforming health care delivery to ensure all Ontarians have access to quality community health services

Health care patterns have shifted dramatically from the 1950s when our current system was designed. At that point, needs were primarily for acute care.

Today, broader health needs include prevention, treatment and long-term management of chronic illnesses. In



addition, new technologies, treatments and medications that were not foreseen by the original planners have been developed to diagnose and treat illnesses.

Our primary health care is provided by a variety of workers, including doctors, physiotherapists, nurse practitioners, midwives, naturopaths and specialists of all kinds to keep us healthy. We need integrated care from a variety of licensed professionals, on an ongoing basis.

Your Green MPPs will:

- Re-prioritize funding to support doctors and other health professionals for family/community care clinics that are integrated with public health.
- Put communities back in charge of local health care decisions.
- Finally deliver on electronic health records by using best practises from other places.

We will re-prioritize funding to support doctors and other health professionals for family/community care clinics that are integrated with public health.

More than 730,000 Ontarians do not have a family doctor, and of those that do, almost nine in ten say they are waiting too long for appointments. Of the eleven countries the government regularly surveys for comparison purposes, Ontario is dead last in timely access to primary care.

In multi-disciplinary family care teams, all key primary care health professionals work together, on a 24/7 basis. Experts agree that collaboration with other health professionals - pharmacists, nurse practitioners, physiotherapists, ultrasound technicians, home care workers, dieticians, and specialists, is an effective way for doctors to work.

We also need to use each profession's competencies to the maximum. Ontario's regulation of health care professions hasn't kept pace with the evolution in the education and training of health care professionals, nor with practices in other jurisdictions.

Using each of Ontario's more than 100,000 health care providers' abilities to the fullest would create more capacity and enhance access to health care services. Expanding each professions scope of practice to match proven competencies enables the same services to be delivered by the most cost effective provider, promotes patient choice and helps to address wait lists and the physician shortage. This would provide better value for money in the health care system.

This way, patients get timely access to the right treatment and diagnosis, when they need it. This helps us stay healthy and heal faster, and improves the sustainability and efficiency of our health care system.



Your Green MPPs will:

- Invest an additional \$1.6 billion over four years in Family Health Teams, Aboriginal Health Access Centres, Nurse Practitioner led clinics and Community Care Centres; clinics and practices that team doctors with nurses, dieticians, psychologists, counsellors, physiotherapists and others.
- Establish a new goal of providing 50% of Ontarians with access to a family care teams by 2016, rising to 90% by 2020.
- Amend profession-specific acts of regulated health care professions to allow members of those professions to practise to the full extent of their demonstrated competencies as verified by their respective regulatory bodies.
- Revamp the current fee-for-service pay model. Move towards salaried and other funding models (either alone or in combination) that expand access, patient-centred care and encourage health promotion and innovation.
- Remove all unnecessary restrictions on the registration of foreign-trained health care practitioners, while at the same time ensuring that only those practitioners with the required expertise to practise safely and effectively in Ontario are granted access.
- Regulate Complementary and Alternative Professions (CAM) to offer more patient choice.

We will put communities back in charge of local health care decisions.

The Green Party believes that communities need to be a part of health care decisions.

Local Health Integration Networks (LHINs), established in 2006 to promote regional efficiencies, are not meeting their promise of community participation. Far too many decisions are being made behind closed doors without citizen and community participation.

An immediate evaluation of LHINs should proceed. Once that evaluation has occurred we can have a responsible debate about the future of LHINs and about what reforms are needed to make them work better.

At the end of the day whether they are called LHINs, District Health Councils, or something else, the Green Party believes that Ontario needs regional health authorities and local decision making. Communities have unique needs. It is appropriate and cost-effective to make decisions at the community level according to plans, guidelines and strategies set by the provincial government.

Your Green MPPs will:

- **Immediately embark on an evaluation of Local Health Integration Networks. We need to reform LHINs so that we have real community engagement and decision making, not additional bureaucracy.**
- **Ensure that LHINs conduct meetings and make decision in an open and transparent way.**
- **Place strict limits on administrative and consulting budgets for LHINs.**

We will finally deliver on electronic health records by using best practises from other places.

The current eHealth debacle notwithstanding, Ontario needs a comprehensive, effective and efficient system for recording and sharing health care records. An eHealth system that works is central to efficiency, collaboration between health care professionals, the identification and adoption of evidence-based best clinical practices and to patient centred care.

Working eHealth systems have proven to reduce errors and treatment misadventures, speed diagnosis and treatment and avoid the unnecessary and expensive duplication of tests and treatments. The longer we wait to transition to eHealth, the more it costs our health and our budget.

One of the reasons for the eHealth debacle is that the government looked to create a unique, made-in-Ontario system. There are eHealth systems that work quite well elsewhere and could be readily adapted to Ontario. The Green Party would adopt global best practices, fix the current government's management deficiencies, and put this project back on track.

Your Green MPPs will:

- **Enlist organizations such as the Canadian Health Information Management Association to identify best eHealth practices that could be quickly implemented in Ontario.**
- **Establish hard budgets and deliverables and carefully monitor eHealth expenditures.**
- **Ensure that eHealth salaries are reasonable and tied to getting the job done.**

3. Honouring our seniors by improving the care available to Ontario's ageing population

Over the coming decades, the success of Ontario's health-care strategy and the sustainability of our public system will depend on providing cost effective and dignified care for seniors. Ontario must honour seniors by providing access to quality home care, transitional care and long-term care facilities.

This issue is critical, and we can't continue to punt it down the road. We need transparency as to what the true gap between need and delivery is, and the political courage to quickly develop a coherent and honest plan to tackle it.

We will:

- Ensure that seniors receive a quality continuum of care coordinated by case managers.
- Support all long-term care facilities to provide services in compliance with provincial standards.



We will ensure that seniors receive a quality continuum of care coordinated by case managers.

It is clear that professional home care, transitional care, assisted living and long term care services are an important part of enriching the quality of life and the health and well-being of seniors.

The Green Party will promote a continuum of care, so that home care services, supported housing, assisted housing, transitional and respite care, and long term care are available when and where they are needed. This not only provides better service for seniors, their families, and their caregivers, but it also is less expensive than hospital care and leads to efficiencies for the whole health care system.

Case managers from primary care teams will act as the lynch-pin in the system, taking a proactive approach to an individual's health care needs. Case Managers also provide efficiencies and improves access by coordinating and navigating the different types of services required and services available for seniors.

Your Green MPPs will:

- Invest an additional \$2 billion over 4 years in better, more affordable care for seniors.
 - Investments will focus on providing an appropriate continuum of care for seniors, including increased investment in home care, transitional care, assisted living and long term care services.
 - Provide additional tax credits for family members staying home to care for seniors.
 - Invest in case managers to help seniors navigate the health care system.
 - Create an assisted living and affordable housing strategy focused on the seniors population, coordinating with other levels of government. The focus will be to give seniors the support they require so they can live as well and as independently as possible, for as long as possible.
 - Investments to support all long term care homes to provide services in compliance with provincial standards.
- Ensure that funding actually is implemented. For example, Ontario announced in 2008 a \$1.1 billion Aging At Home Strategy but after two years, only \$45 million went to home care services.
- Amend the Assessment Act to exempt all not-for-profit homes from property taxes, whether they began as nursing homes or charitable homes.



We will support all long-term care facilities to provide services in compliance with provincial standards.

A study by PriceWaterhouseCoopers found that Ontario's funding of long-term care homes falls behind other Canadian provinces and compared unfavourably with the State of Mississippi, the poorest state in the United States! Our seniors deserve better.

Long-term care homes are funded by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care through a complex system. Under the funding system, long-term care homes cannot transfer money from one area to another, regardless of need, and money unspent in any particular envelope is re-claimed by the Ministry of Health at the end of the year.

This rigid system limits long-term care homes' ability to be innovative or to respond to unique or changing circumstances and requirements. The very heavy, detailed and centralized "one-size-fits-all" regulation also inhibits the ability to respond to unique or changing circumstances and discourages innovation.

Green MPPs would reform the funding model for long-term care homes to increase flexibility and to encourage innovation and efficiencies. We would also work with the Ontario Association of Non-Profit Homes and Services for Seniors, the Ontario Long Term Care Association, seniors organizations and other stakeholders to develop comprehensive strategic plan for seniors' care and to identify appropriate funding levels for long-term care homes.

Your Green MPPs will:

- Support a government led capacity planning exercise to develop a comprehensive, long-term strategy for the long term care sector, including a sustainable funding strategy to serve our ageing population
- Review the regulatory framework for long-term care homes to ensure high quality care, while encouraging innovation and without placing onerous administrative burdens on front-line staff.
- Re-examine implementation of the government's Appropriate Level of Care strategy, particularly the critical needs component, to achieve a balance between patients' needs and the ethnic, cultural or religious makeup of individual homes.

