

Pressuring Provincial Politicians

***A guide to lobbying
MPPs to help keep the
Trillium Drug Program public***



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What is “lobbying”?

“Lobbying” means communicating directly with a public official about an issue that matters to you. You can lobby your MPP by:

- Phone
- Fax
- E-mail
- Personal visits
- Leaflets
- Rallies and demonstrations

Why lobby your MPP

Lobbying MPPs can be a good way to bring your issue to the attention of the government. That’s because government MPPs can raise your issue in caucus and bring it up with government ministers and the premiers’ office.

Lobbying opposition MPPs can help, too. Opposition MPPs can ask questions in the legislature and raise issues with the media. Depending on your issue, lobbying politicians at the municipal or federal level or representatives of community groups to support your campaign can also be effective.

Lobbying can make a difference. Here’s why:

- First, the top priority of most MPPs is to get re-elected. So if there is an issue that will affect a large number of voters in their constituencies or attract media attention, they are going to want to know about it – and be seen to be doing something about it.
- Second, there are dozens of issues that MPPs need to be aware of and vote on as best they can. Most are experts in one or two issues at best. So hearing about an important issue directly from people who are personally involved – and who know the facts – can have an impact.
- Third, the McGuinty Liberals are different from the Harris Tories. They are more vulnerable. The Liberals have to balance the opinions and the clout of many more interest groups than the Tories did. In most cases, they are more likely to look for a compromise than a fight.

Personal office visits matter

One way politicians measure the importance of an issue is by the amount of effort constituents and others make to bring it forward.

You are voters. You are also frontline experts on your issue. If you meet directly with the MPP and deliver a clear message on a hot topic, you can be sure you’ll get a hearing.

Sitting down with a politician also opens a relationship. It is an opportunity to build respect for OPSEU and our position, and it sets the stage for an ongoing dialogue.

Preparing before you meet your MPP

- ✓ Teamwork helps. It's best to organize your visit so that several people (2-4) can attend. Pick members who know the issues. Try to include members who represent your membership. Be sure to pick members who are willing to speak their minds, stay on target, and ask for solid commitments from the MPP.
- ✓ Pick one person to act as team leader. The team leader's job is to coordinate the discussion and ensure all our points are covered.
- ✓ Decide in advance who is going to talk about which points. Then stick to your plan.
- ✓ Select a second member to be the team's recorder. The recorder should watch, listen and take notes on the key points that are discussed and how the MPP's responds.
- ✓ Plan on having up to 30 minutes with the MPP. More than that is bonus time.
- ✓ Focus on the goal of the meeting:
 - to educate the MPP about the Trillium Drug Program and the serious problems with privatization
 - to ask the MPP for his/her support for the campaign to keep the program public
 - to get the MPP to commit to raising the issue in caucus, with the Minister and with the Premier.

Booking your appointment

- ✓ When you call to set up an appointment, be clear that you represent OPSEU. Use our full name – the Ontario Public Service Employees Union. Explain that you want to talk to the MPP about the plan to privatize the Trillium Drug Program and the serious issues it raises. But don't go into too much detail. You don't want to steal your own thunder.
- ✓ Don't be put off if the MPP's staff tries to avoid setting up a meeting. Be polite but persistent. If necessary, remind the staff person that OPSEU represents thousands of area households (voters).
- ✓ If you think there is no way you are going to get to meet the MPP, agree to talk to a staffer when necessary.

During your meeting

- ✓ MPPs see a lot of people. Don't be surprised if they get called out during your meeting or they are late. Be prepared to shorten your presentation and cut to the chase if you have less time than you expected.
- ✓ Be prepared to answer questions or provide additional information. Know the details in advance.
- ✓ Start with our most important messages. Be prepared for a quick exchange and adjust if your time suddenly disappears.
- ✓ Be clear about what you want the MPP to do. Ask for a commitment that he/she will raise the issue in caucus and bring it up directly with Health Minister George Smitherman and Premier McGuinty.
- ✓ Tell the MPP you will call back to follow up and give him/her your contact info, in case he/she needs more information.
- ✓ Be sure to leave the MPP a button and a copy of any OPSEU flyers or other materials on the campaign to keep the Trillium Drug Program public.

A few do's and don'ts

- ✓ Do remember that the MPP owes her/his job to you and your neighbours. You deliver critical programs that matter to the community and to local voters. It's important that you be heard.
- ✓ Don't argue with the MPP or staffer. Be polite and diplomatic as you present information that supports our position. Be patient and flexible.
- ✓ Do be political. Show how our interests are connected to the interests of voters in the MPP's constituency.
- ✓ Do ask the MPP where she/he stands on the issue.
- ✓ Do speak from your experience as a union member, Trillium Drug Program worker and front-line public servant. MPP's like to take real situations back to the legislature, to the Minister and to their caucus meetings.
- ✓ Don't get sidetracked by the MPP's schmoozing. If the MPP starts rambling, politely but firmly redirect the conversation back to the point of your visit.
- ✓ Do ask directly if the MPP will commit to taking specific steps. Be sure to get an answer. Steps you should ask MPPs to take include:
 - Raising the Trillium Drug Program issue in caucus – including how it threatens the level and quality of client service, the security of clients' confidential information, and public accountability for the program's delivery
 - Supporting the call to keep the Trillium Drug Program public
 - Raising the issue with Health Minister George Smitherman and with Premier McGuinty.
- ✓ Do let the MPP know you intend to follow up with them soon.
- ✓ Do send the MPP a short thank-you message after your meeting restating the key points you discussed and the specific commitments you received.

Follow-up report

Your team should get together right after your meeting with the MPP to debrief. Compare your thoughts on what you discussed and what the results were. Check that these match the notes your recorder took.

Your recorder should then complete the MPP Lobby Report, give a copy to your local president and/or send a copy to Myles Magner at OPSEU head office (fax: 416-443-1763 or mmagner@opseu.org).

Phone calls, faxes, e-mails & letters

Face-to-face meetings with MPPs are extremely powerful. But there are lots of other ways to get our message across. You – and other members in your local – can speak to your MPP by phone or leave a message with the MPP's staff. You can send a fax and/or an email. You can write a personal letter. Each of these methods works, so encourage other members in your local to get involved.

If other members are going to be contacting their MPPs, ask them to give you a copy of their letter, fax or e-mail message and/or a report on the contact. Keep track of these contacts and report any new information to your local president.

Keep the Trillium Drug Program Public!

Speaking notes & key messages to MPPs

These notes will help you prepare your presentation and focus on the key messages you want to deliver to your MPP. Be sure to use your knowledge of the Trillium Drug Program and offer examples of key OPSEU concerns.

Note: Cabinet ministers are generally addressed as “Minister” rather than by their first names – although most will ask that you use their names. With backbenchers, it’s less formal. Use their first names or Mr./Ms _____ if you haven’t met them before.

1) Introductions: Breaking the ice, why we’re here, why it matters

- Thank the MPP for agreeing to meet with you.
- Introduce yourself, including your name, where you work and the fact that you are an OPSEU member.
- Explain that you asked for the meeting to discuss plans by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to privatize Ontario’s Trillium Drug Program, and the serious issues that this plan raises.
- Ask each member of our group to introduce themselves.

2) Deliver your message

Here are some key points you can use to explain why the Trillium Drug Program matters and why privatization is such a bad idea:

About the Trillium Drug Program

- First let me tell you a bit about the Trillium Drug Program.
- The program is one of the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care’s major success stories. It was created to provide subsidies to Ontarians who face extremely high drug costs and who could not afford their medications without help from the province.
- Today, the program helps roughly 200,000 Ontarians each year. The program’s clients include people with arthritis, cancer, cystic fibrosis, heart disease, HIV/AIDS, multiple sclerosis, respiratory diseases and other serious health problems.
- Before it was launched in 1995, Trillium clients faced a stark choice. Those who had a few dollars saved, a house they could sell or an RRSP they could cash in had only one option – to pay their drugs bills out of their own pockets, often costing thousands of dollars.
- Those who didn’t have the resources didn’t get their drugs – at least not until they were driven into poverty and onto social assistance.

- Either way, the results were severe financial hardship and real barriers to treatment for thousands of people with serious health problems.
- Today the Trillium Drug Program provides coverage for approximately 80,000 Ontario families, totaling \$185 million per year.
- During the 2003 provincial election campaign, Dalton McGuinty and the Ontario Liberals promised to reinvest in Ontario's public health care system. He also pledged to rebuild Ontario's public services.
- The Trillium Drug Program is exactly the kind of vital public health service that Dalton McGuinty promised to protect.
- But just before Christmas, the Ministry of Health issued a Request for Proposals to contract out the Trillium Drug Program to the private sector. They also issued layoff notices to the Program's 73 OPSEU staff.

Why privatization is a bad idea

- Privatization is a bad idea. If this plan goes ahead:
 - It will mean that a private, for-profit corporation will decide whether Trillium clients get the drugs they need.
 - It will put clients' confidential health and income tax information into the hands of the private contractor.
 - It will undercut public accountability for how the program is run and the quality of service that clients receive.
 - And it will undercut public control over administrative and program costs for a program that is worth \$185 million per year.
- The risks here are real. In December, 2005, the provincial Auditor General identified systemic problems with the security, accountability, quality and costs of programs that the government has downloaded or contracted out. At the Ministry of Transportation, contracting out to the private sector resulted in thousands of security breaches, including the loss or theft of 56,000 drivers' licences, licence plates and other permits.
- Yet this is exactly the same kind of "alternate service delivery model" that managers at the Health Ministry want to use for the Trillium Drug Program.
- Privatization will also result in a major disruption in service to Trillium clients. The program depends on the knowledge and skill of the 73 OPSEU members who make it run. But only 4 Trillium staff have asked for the option of transferring to the private contractor. As a result, the program will be facing a 95% staff turn-over. The work OPSEU members do at the program includes:
 - reviewing and processing approximately 80,000 program applications (new applications and applications for renewal) and supporting documents (including verifying income data with the Canada Revenue Agency) per year
 - manually reviewing and processing approx. 370,000 drug receipts
 - processing requests for coverage of drugs not listed in the Ontario Drug Benefit Formulary

- processing changes to clients' enrolment information
 - processing notifications of termination from the program
 - providing information and answering clients' questions by phone (177,000 calls per year), in writing and in person
- The Trillium Drug Program can be run efficiently within the Ontario Public Service. The MOHLTC has already invested in developing a new automatic renewal process and negotiated computer access to Canada Revenue Agency income data. When fully implemented in 2006/07, these changes will reduce administrative costs and improve service. Privatization is unnecessary, and will only mean that a private company will profit from these improvements.
 - In addition to the risks privatization poses for Trillium clients, the negative impact on Trillium employees will overwhelmingly affect women workers, who make up 80% of the program's staff.

Problems with the Trillium RFP process

- There are also real problems with the process the Ministry is using to privatize Trillium.
- First, the Ministry issued its request for proposals with no prior consultation with groups that represent Trillium clients and health care providers.
- Second, they have set an artificial deadline of June 30 to hand the program over to a private contractor – even though the vendor will not be selected until late March.
- This timeline is so unrealistic that even potential bidders are asking questions. For example, in a question submitted as a formal part of the RFP process, one vendor asked:

“The time frame for transition from awarding the contract to implementation (March 24-June 30) seems very short. Can you indicate if any transition procedures can extend beyond June 30?”
- The rush to dump the Trillium Drug Program only adds to the threat to service quality and the security of clients' confidential information.
- Whether intentionally or not, the artificial June 30 deadline may also be giving one potential bidder an unfair advantage. Why? Because one vendor already has a contract for a smaller drug program that has been folded into the Trillium RFP.
- That company is Resolve Corporation. Resolve currently handles administrative work for the Ontario Drug Benefit Program's Senior Co-payment Program. While this is smaller and simpler program to administer, it does use some of the same systems as Trillium. So the tight timeline may be giving Resolve the inside track.
- Resolve Corporation is also part of a private sector consortium that is redesigning the federal gun registration and licencing system – a project famous for delays and cost-overruns. In the coming weeks, the Federal Auditor General will be issuing a report on the gun registry project which should identify the reasons for these problems.

- Resolve’s predecessor company, BDP Business Data Services, has also been investigated by the federal Privacy Commissioner for its work on the gun registry project. In his 2001-2002 annual report, the Commissioner found that BDP had a “normal practice” of discarding confidential gun registry documents in regular garbage bins.
- This is particularly disturbing, given the sensitive information that Trillium clients are required to provide.
- BDP also had a contract with the Ontario Ministry of the Environment until 2003/04. Following a performance audit by the Ministry in 2003, this contract was not renewed. Unfortunately, the details of the contract and the performance audit are not available. They are the subject of an ongoing Freedom of Information Request, which Resolve has appealed to the Information and Privacy Commissioner.
- The Trillium Drug Program is too important to gamble with. The people with the most to lose here are the thousands of Trillium clients. They are the ones who will experience delays in getting their questions answered, their applications approved and their drug costs reimbursed. And it is their confidential information that will be handed over to a private corporation.
- It’s time to put on the brakes – before it’s too late.

3) Ask for the MPP’s help

- Given what you have heard, we hope you agree that privatizing the Trillium Drug Program is the wrong way to go.
- At the very least, we think the Ministry’s plan should be put on hold immediately. That would give the Minister time to take a close look at the integrity of the RFP process. It would also allow him to consult with Trillium Drug Program clients, health care providers, health advocacy groups and Trillium staff about what is best for the program, **before** taking any further steps towards privatization.
- So, we want to ask for your help:
 - First, we ask you to take a public position against the privatization of the Trillium Drug Program.
 - Secondly, we ask that you support the call to put the privatization on hold until it can be studied further and the serious issues we have identified have been addressed.
 - Third, we ask that you raise the issue of the Trillium Drug Program – and the serious problems with the Ministry’s privatization plan:
 - with your caucus colleagues
 - with George Smitherman, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care
 - with the Premier, and
 - in the house when the legislature reconvenes.
- If you have any questions, we’d be happy to try to answer them for you...

4) Wrap up

- As you've heard, this is an important issue and there is a lot on the line in the Ministry's plans to privatize the Trillium Drug Program.
- We'd like to thank you for taking the time to meet with us – and for agreeing to _____.
- We'll follow up with you over the next few weeks, and keep you updated on our campaign to keep the Trillium Drug Program public.
- In the meantime, if you need any additional information, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Lobby Report: Trillium Drug Program Campaign

MPP Visited: _____ Date of Visit: _____

OPSEU Lobby Team Leader: _____

Phone: _____ E-mail: _____

Lobby Team Members: _____

Did the team manage to deliver core OPSEU messages? Yes No

What specific issues were discussed?

What questions did the MPP have?

What was the MPP's response? What specific commitments did you get?

Please complete this report right after meeting your MPP. Provide any additional information or comments on an extra page. Give a copy of this report to your local president or campaign coordinator and/or send a copy to Myles Magner at OPSEU (Fax: 416-443-1762, e-mail: mmagner@opseu.org).