

HEALTH

The Budget does not address the deficits the hospitals are carrying, which means their budgets get eroded by debt charges.

It's expected that about 80 per cent of Ontario hospitals will be in debt this year.

Impacts include more crowded hospitals, longer waits, less access, traveling further for care, more super bugs, more privatization and more user fees.

In January OPSEU organized a press conference with CUPE, CAW and SEIU in which we pointed out that 2.1 per cent base funding – the amount announced in the March 26 budget – would mean the loss of 5,000 FTEs in the hospital sector, 4,000 through attrition and 1,000 through layoff.

Many hospitals have already announced their cuts...for example:

- Guelph is closing an entire unit of 16 beds, plus closing their asthma clinic
- Kingston General Hospital and Kingston Hotel Dieu have already announced they are shedding a combined 250 FTEs
- Hamilton's major hospitals have said they will be shedding a combined 500 FTEs, St. Joe's Hamilton is not longer doing outpatient lab testing

Hospitals received \$403 million more towards base funding in this year's budget (2.1 per cent). The OHA estimates it needs 3.5 per cent more in base funding to maintain the status quo. While hospitals did receive an overall increase of 3.5 per cent in the Budget, 1.4 per cent of that is earmarked for special initiatives and not available for general expenditures.

Health care spending represents 39 per cent of total provincial spending. Hospital funding continues to decline in proportion to the overall health budget. At present, they represent about one third of total health expenditures. In 1992 it was close to 50 per cent.

Total health care spending increased by \$1.9 billion in this Budget – but of that amount \$527 million came from the Canada Health Transfer and, for the first time, an additional \$347 million in equalization payments which traditionally go to health and social services.

Last year hospitals were also under funded, receiving only 2.4 per cent more, pushing many into deficit.