



DOWNEY DIGEST

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A NOTE FROM DOUG

While January is a time for refocusing and refreshing, February is a time to get back to the work that makes our province great. I am excited to return to the Ontario Legislature later this month, and to continue to represent the voices of Barrie - Springwater - Oro-Medonte. The government has been hard at work over the break, listening and responding to the concerns presented by the people of Ontario. As you will see in this edition of the Downey Digest, your concerns about the health care system have been heard, and the province is pleased to release a comprehensive plan, known as [Your Health: A Plan for Connected and Convenient Care](#). This plan seeks to address concerns over access to care, and ensuring that home care is readily available and easily accessible.

A PLAN FOR CONNECTED AND CONVENIENT CARE

The Ontario government recently released Your Health: A Plan for Connected and Convenient Care. This plan focuses on providing people with a better health care experience by connecting them to more convenient options closer to home, while shortening wait times for key services around the province and growing the health care work force for years to come.

The plan lays out a broad set of initiatives under three pillars: The Right Care in the Right place, Faster Access to Care and Hiring More Health Care Workers.



Pillar One: The Right Care in the Right Place

- Expanding the role of pharmacists so that people can connect to care closer to home at their local pharmacy, and giving family doctors more time for appointments with people who need more specialized care for more serious concerns. As of January 1, 2023, pharmacists are able to prescribe medications for 13 common ailments at no extra cost.
- Making it faster and easier for youth to connect with mental health and substance use support, primary care, social services and more by adding eight Youth Wellness Hubs to the 14 that are already operating across the province.
- Expanding team-based care through Ontario Health Teams to better connect and coordinate people's care within their own community by improving their transition between various health care providers and ensuring their health records follow them wherever they go for care. Introducing new primary care networks under Ontario Health Teams and expanding team models of primary care with up to 1,200 more physicians being added to the family health organizations.

Pillar Two: Faster Access to care

- Making it easier and faster to get publicly funded surgeries and procedures by further leveraging the support of community surgical and diagnostic centres to eliminate surgical backlogs and reduce wait times. This includes investing more than **\$18 million** in existing surgical centres to cover care for thousands of patients, including more than 49,000 hours of MRI and CT scans, 4,800 cataract surgeries, 900 other ophthalmic surgeries, 1,000 minimally invasive gynecological surgeries and 2,845 plastic surgeries.
- Providing paramedics with more flexibility to treat people who call 9-1-1 at home or on scene in the community rather than in emergency rooms.
- Building almost 60,000 new and upgraded long-term care beds to help address wait lists for long-term care and ensure seniors are being cared for in the right place, where they can connect to supports, activities, and social activities.

Pillar Three; Hiring More Health Care Workers

- Moving Forward with the largest medical school education expansion in more than a decade by adding 160 undergraduate seats and 295 postgraduate positions over the next five years.
- Expanding education and training opportunities for those interested in working in health care, including expanding the Learn and Stay grant that is helping over a dozen growing and underserved communities grow their health care workforce by covering the costs of tuition, books and other direct educational costs for postsecondary students who enroll in high-priority programs in return for working in those communities for up to two years after they graduate.
- Introducing new "As of Right" rules that will allow health care workers registered in other provinces and territories to immediately start working and caring for people without first having to register with Ontario's health regulatory colleges.

CONNECTING MORE PEOPLE TO CARE AT HOME

As part of Your Health: A Plan for Connected and Convenient Care, Ontario is connecting people to convenient care at home and in their community so more Ontarians can choose to stay in their homes for longer as they age or are able to receive care closer to home. Delivering convenient care at home provides for a better experience for people and frees up more space in hospitals, long-term care homes and doctors' offices.

Last year, the government invested **\$1 billion** to expand the delivery of home and community care services. From caregiver supports and respite services, bereavement and behavioral programs to assisted living, work is underway to provide faster and more convenient care.



The province is also working with Ontario Health Teams and home and community care providers to create new and innovative programs for people wanting to connect to care at home, including more virtual care options and connecting home care services with other care providers such as a family doctor to ensure personal medical records follow people as they move between care providers. These investments will help nearly 70,000 families who rely on home care annually to be able to connect to care more conveniently.

With the helps of paramedics, those living with chronic health conditions can now live at home more independently and avoid regularly visits to the hospital waiting room. Ontario's expanded community paramedicine program is already in place in 55 communities and has connected more than 30,000 people to 24/7 non-emergency supports at home. The initiative allows paramedics to use their training and expertise to provide home visits for a range of services, including making sure medication is taken as prescribed, educating people on how to manage their chronic conditions and providing assessments and referrals to local community care services, such as homecare.