the health care we need

THE ONTARIO LIBERAL PLAN FOR BETTER HEALTH CARE
March 2003

Public health care is the best health care. We believe medicare is a fundamental statement of the values we share as Ontarians and as Canadians. Our job is to make health care work better so you get the care you need, when you need it.

The Romanow Commission proved that the way forward is to improve medicare, so that it responds better to your needs. Privatization takes us backward, to an era when we received only the care we could pay for out of our pockets.

Romanow called on us to strengthen our public health care system, not give up on it. To modernize, not privatize, medicare.

We couldn’t agree more.

The Harris-Eves government believes in better access for those who can afford to pay. We have a plan for better health care – for everyone.

The Harris-Eves government believes in more private health care. They allowed private MRI and CT clinics, opened the door to private hospitals, cut homecare services and raised fees for seniors living in nursing homes.

The Harris-Eves agenda is not what Ontarians want and it’s not what medicare needs.

It’s time for a change. It’s time for a real commitment to medicare and a solid plan to move us forward.

Our plan will:
• Protect and improve universal, public medicare
• Shorten waiting times by providing better access to care
• Provide better care at home, in hospitals and in communities
• Train and recruit more doctors and nurses
• Make Ontario the healthiest province in Canada

Finally, we will make the health care system answer to you, the people who depend on it. For the first time, we will set standards, make them public and give power to an independent, objective body to report directly to you on performance.

That’s the health care we need. But it’s not the health care we’re getting with the Harris-Eves agenda of creeping privatization.

Join us as we work hard to improve medicare in a way that is true to our values. Together, we can make sure we all get the health care we need.

Dalton McGuinty
Leader of the Ontario Liberal Party
We need a fresh injection of the values, commitment and leadership that built medicare. The Harris-Eves government weakened public health care because they are not committed to it. They gave us overcrowded and understaffed hospitals, longer waiting lists, clogged emergency rooms and fewer surgeries.

The Harris-Eves government opened the door to private MRI and CT clinics and private hospitals. They believe in buy-your-way-to-the-front-of-the-line health care. We believe in a universal, publicly funded health care system that gives us all the care we need, when we need it.

The Harris-Eves government put tax cuts for large corporations ahead of your health care. They left us with the second fewest doctors, nurses and hospital beds per capita in Canada. We will put your health care first. We will invest in medicare to make Ontario a health care leader once again.

The Harris-Eves government fired thousands of nurses and added to a severe doctor shortage. Now, nearly one million Ontarians cannot find basic care. We will recruit and train more health care professionals so that no one goes without the medical attention they need and deserve.

The Harris-Eves government turned its back on public health. They did too little to make us healthier, but plenty to make us sick. They gave us dirty air and tainted water and they ignored the need to help us stay healthy in the first place. We will help you stay healthy at every age and stage in your life – in school, at work, in your community and during retirement.
commitment to medicare

The Harris-Eves government has failed to protect public health care because they want to open the door to private, American-style, two-tier care. They have deliberately kept the public in the dark about the quality of care. We will make a legal, binding commitment to public medicare and ensure that you have the information to hold any government accountable for delivering quality health care.

Commitment to Medicare Act

We will pass a Commitment to Medicare Act that will make universal, public medicare the law in Ontario.

The Harris-Eves government is opening the way to private MRI and CT clinics and private hospitals. As the Romanow Commission proved, privatization is a step backward.

We will end the Harris-Eves agenda of creeping privatization.

“No early in my mandate, I challenged those advocating radical solutions – user fees, medical savings accounts, de-listing services, greater privatization, a parallel private system – to come forward with evidence…. There is no evidence that these solutions will deliver better or cheaper care, or improve access (except, perhaps, for those who can afford to pay out of their own pockets).”

– Roy Romanow

We believe all Ontarians should have access to medically necessary health care services based on need, not on ability to pay.

Under our plan, two-tier medicare will be illegal in Ontario.


The Eves Agenda – Two-Tier Health Care

“Last week in Barrie, Mr. Eves said people should be able to buy their way to the front of the health-care line.” – National Post, January 21, 2002

“Ernie Eves... said yesterday that the province may have to allow two-tier health care where patients can pay for services themselves if they don’t want to wait for treatment under medicare.” – Globe and Mail, January 12, 2002

The straight goods

We will report directly to you on health care because you have a right to know how your health care system is doing.

You deserve more than misleading TV advertisements, paid for with your health care dollars. You deserve the straight goods on health care.

We will make accountability to the public a central principle of medicare in Ontario. We will create an independent Health Standards Council that will track health care measures that are important to you. Are we reducing waiting times? Are we eliminating ER backlogs? Are we hiring more doctors and nurses? Is the health of Ontarians improving? Are you getting value for your hard-earned tax dollars? You have a right to know the answers. The arms’ length Health Standards Council will deliver them, directly to you.
The Harris-Eves Record: No Accountability

- Stopped reporting to the public on emergency room backlogs in 2000 because the problem had become so bad.
- Prevented the Provincial Auditor from auditing how health care dollars are spent.
- Wasted health dollars on tax cuts and political advertising.

Value for money

We will make sure that your health care dollars are invested wisely.

In order to give Ontarians the health care they need, we have to be smart with our health care dollars. We have already found areas where we could be doing better:

- We could save up to $30 million every year by adding generic drugs to the Ontario Drug Benefit Program as soon as they are approved by Health Canada.
- We could save, at a minimum, hundreds of millions of dollars every year by making pharmacists part of family health care to help you manage your prescription medicines.

We will give the Provincial Auditor the authority to audit all health care agencies and deliverers.

Almost half of the Ontario budget is spent on health care, but the Harris-Eves government prevents the Provincial Auditor from investigating whether it is being spent well. That is why we will give the Auditor the authority to audit all health care agencies and deliverers.
shorter waiting times

The Harris-Eves government believes in shorter waiting times for those who can afford to pay. We believe in better access to universal, public medicare for everyone. The time it takes to receive care should be determined by medical experts, not politicians.

**Shorter waiting times**

We will work with experts to set and meet maximum needs-based waiting times for care.

These standards will be made public, so you know you will get treated within a safe time period. We will begin by setting and meeting standards for cardiac care, cancer care, total joint replacements and MRI/CT scans.

We will meet these standards by making the smart investments described in this plan and by building on successes like the Cardiac Care Network.

*Only 31% of cancer patients are receiving radiation treatment within the recommended four-week period.*

**Public MRI’s and CT’s**

We will expand MRI and CT services in the public system to provide better access for everyone.

The Harris-Eves government opened private, two-tier MRI and CT clinics. These clinics will sell vanity scans alongside public services, giving quicker access to those who can afford to buy their way to the front of the line.

We will cancel the Harris-Eves private clinics and replace them with public services. The Romanow Commission proved there is no evidence to support expanding private diagnostic services.

Many communities have already raised money for a new MRI or CT for their local hospital, but have been denied operating funds by the Harris-Eves government. Instead of opening private clinics, we will work with these communities to expand access in the public system.
better care

An effective health care system provides access to quality care in many different settings – at your local doctor’s office, in a community hospital, in a regional health centre, in your own home or elsewhere in the community. The Harris-Eves government’s centralized approach has produced more bureaucracy, not better health care. We will ensure that services are available where you need them, when you need them.

Better family health care

We will deliver better family health care through family health teams.

Family health teams will deliver better care to you and a better quality of working life for health professionals. They will deliver care centred on you, the patient. You will have access to care from a professional who knows you and knows your history.

Family health teams will be made up of doctors, nurses, nurse practitioners, pharmacists and other health care professionals who will protect and promote your health. You will have access to a team member around the clock so that you do not have to wait in an emergency room with minor health problems.

Most important, your team will focus on keeping you healthy, not just on treating you when you are sick.
We will establish at least 150 family health teams across Ontario.

Better family health care will not happen through a top-down, one-size-fits-all approach. To ensure better health care, we will:

- Help communities build family health teams that meet their needs.
- Create incentives for doctors to practice in teams.
- Make the latest information technology available to professionals who practice in teams. Teams will use electronic health records that you control and they administer.
- Work with medical schools, universities and colleges to prepare new professionals to practice in family health teams.

Helping our hospitals

We will take pressure off our hospitals so you will not have to wait long hours in overcrowded emergency rooms for necessary care.

The Harris-Eves government closed hospitals, shut down emergency rooms, removed beds and slashed budgets. The result: overcrowded hospitals and emergency rooms, cancelled surgeries and patients waiting too long for care.

Hospitals need immediate relief and long-term stability so patients can get better care.

We will place an immediate moratorium on ER closures. We will unclog existing ER’s, ensure safe occupancy levels in hospitals and move patients out of hallways by opening 1,600 beds. Finally, we will create better community supports so you do not have to stay in the hospital if you do not need to be there.

We will bring stability to our hospitals by providing adequate multi-year funding.
**Stronger health sciences centres**

We will strengthen our health sciences centres with stable, multi-year funding that meets their unique needs.

We know how important these centres of excellence are to the communities they serve. They deliver our most complex care, educate our health care professionals and discover new medical miracles.

Under the Harris-Eves government, underfunding and thoughtless centralization forced important programs to be cancelled, devastating affected communities. Ottawa and London were hit particularly hard and lost valuable public services.

**Better homecare**

We will invest in homecare so that Ontarians can receive better care at home.

The Harris-Eves government cut funding and lowered standards. Now, over 115,000 Ontarians are forced to either go without care or receive it in an institution.

Romanow identified homecare as an essential component of modern medicare. Our long-term vision is to make homecare a medically necessary service. Our first step is to get our vulnerable and elderly the services they need.

We will remove the arbitrary Harris-Eves limits on homecare. If you require care and want it in your home, and that care costs less than sending you to a hospital or nursing home, we will make sure you get it.
Respect and dignity for seniors

We will build a Seniors Strategy that guarantees our seniors will be treated with respect and dignity.

The Harris-Eves government lowered standards and cut the services that our parents and grandparents need.

We will work with our seniors to develop a comprehensive Seniors Strategy that will improve all services that affect them. We will begin by fixing the mess the Harris-Eves government created and improving key services for seniors. We will:

- Cancel the Harris-Eves 15% increase in nursing home fees.
- Set high standards for our nursing homes and regularly inspect them to make sure those standards are being met.
- Strengthen homecare so seniors can stay in their homes as long as possible.
- Support seniors’ centres that provide social, recreational, educational and volunteer opportunities.
- Improve the Ontario Drug Benefit Program to ensure seniors get the medications they need.

The Harris-Eves Record on Seniors

- Reduced homecare services, forcing the frail and elderly out of their homes and into institutional care.
- Hiked nursing home fees by 15%.
- Removed standards that made sure all nursing home residents received at least 2.25 hours of nursing care daily and 3 baths per week.
- Allowed nursing homes to operate without licenses or regular inspections, as reported by the Provincial Auditor.
• Help seniors better manage their prescription needs through better family health care.
• Work with colleges, universities, health care providers and seniors to ensure proper senior care is taught to all future health care providers.

Success Story Good Companions Seniors Centre, Ottawa

The Good Companions Seniors Centre provides social activities and services necessary to enhance quality of life. Good Companions provides daily fitness classes and craft workshops to help members stay active. It also acts as a resource base, providing information on volunteer opportunities and other community services available to them.

Better mental health care

We will help families struggling with mental illness.

One out of five Ontarians will suffer from mental illness at some time.

Inadequate mental health services also contribute to the homelessness tragedy fostered by the Harris-Eves government.

We will invest in community mental health agencies to improve services, including family self-help, crisis intervention and community treatment. And we will significantly increase supportive housing options for those suffering from mental illness.
health care professionals

We need caring hands and talented minds to improve medicare. The Harris-Eves government demoralized and mismanaged our health care professionals. No wonder we now have the second fewest nurses and family doctors in Canada.

More family doctors

We will ensure there are more family doctors in communities across Ontario.

Family doctors per 100,000 population

We believe you should be able to see a family doctor when you need one. To meet the need for more family doctors, we will increase medical school spots by 15% and increase the number of family medicine training spots.

We will make family medicine more attractive by creating a better quality of working life through family health teams. And we will make medical tuition more affordable and provide loan forgiveness to students who choose family medicine.

The Harris-Eves Record on Doctor Supply: Chronic Shortages

- In 1995, there were 60 under-serviced communities in Ontario, requiring 83 family physicians. Today, there are 122 under-serviced communities, requiring 569 family physicians.
- The Ontario Medical Association estimates that our severe doctor shortage affects nearly one million people.
We will remove barriers preventing well-qualified foreign-trained physicians from practicing in Ontario.

Nearly one million Ontarians do not have a doctor. Meanwhile, we have more than 1,000 foreign-trained physicians waiting to be licensed. We will help our newly-arrived doctors meet Ontario standards and give them the opportunity to practice medicine here, where we need them.

We will hire more nurses and create a better working environment for these hardworking professionals.

The Harris-Eves government disgracefully compared nurses to hula-hoop workers. They fired thousands. Thousands more left.

Nurses are the heart of health care and they deserve better. We will create a positive, rewarding environment for nurses.

We will hire 8,000 new nurses. Our strategy will include the creation of more nursing school spaces and recruitment of nurses who have left the profession or left the province under Harris-Eves.

Our goal is to have 70% of registered nurses working full-time, up from only 50% today.

In addition, we will fund more positions for nurse practitioners, who will play a vital role in delivering better family health care.

The Harris-Eves Record on Nurses

- Fired thousands of nurses at a cost of $400 million, then tried to hire them back.
- Created a poor quality of working life, driving nurses out of the profession. In 2001 alone over 1,700 registered nurses left nursing.
Helping under-serviced communities

We will help under-serviced communities attract and retain doctors and other health care professionals.

If you live in small town Ontario, chances are too high that you do not have the health care you need. We will improve incentives to attract and retain doctors for under-serviced communities. Incentives will be based on the needs of communities and doctors, including important factors like job placement for spouses of physicians.

People who live or train in under-serviced areas are more likely to practice there. That is why we will expand initiatives to train medical professionals in under-serviced areas. As part of this strategy, we will accelerate the development of the Northern Ontario Medical School and the Windsor medical school satellite campus.

We will partner with communities to create at least 150 family health teams. We know it is too hard for doctors to work in small communities on their own. In a family health team, doctors can share the load with other physicians, nurses, nurse practitioners and other professionals.

Success Story: Group Health Centre, Sault Ste. Marie

In 1963, workers in Sault Ste. Marie opened a community organized and operated health complex called Group Health Centre. The Centre was developed in response to community concern about access to medical services. Today, it provides services to over one-half of the people in Sault Ste. Marie. Professionals work as a team to ensure their patients receive comprehensive health care around the clock. The community operates the Centre so that the professionals can practice medicine, not administration.
**Family medical leave**

We will help you care for your parents and other seriously ill family members.

Family members provide critically important support when illness strikes. We will recognize this reality with a new *Family Medical Leave Act* to provide up to six weeks of job-protected unpaid leave to help you care for a member of your family.

**Looking ahead**

We will plan ahead to make sure shortsighted decisions do not leave us short of health care professionals.

We will engage health experts to monitor and anticipate our need for health care professionals and work with colleges and universities to make sure those needs can be met.
helping people stay healthy

Healthy people enjoy a higher quality of life and cost our health system less. Yet the Harris-Eves government has neglected public health and disease prevention initiatives. We will help you stay healthy in school, at work, in your community and during retirement.

Make Ontario Canada’s healthiest province

We will help Ontarians become the healthiest people in Canada.

Beginning with better pre-natal care for expectant moms through to expanded recreation opportunities for seniors, we will help Ontarians of all ages enjoy better health.

A healthy start

We will help expectant mothers with nutrition and pre-natal care through better family health care.

We will knit together the patchwork of programs available to make them more accessible to more Ontarians, especially those in high-risk environments. We will also restore the nutritional allowance for expectant mothers on social assistance, a program that the Harris-Eves government cut.

Our Best Start plan for early childhood education will get our kids off on the right foot, helping them develop healthy habits and learning skills sooner.

Healthy workplaces

We will partner with businesses to create and expand healthy workplace practices.

Smart businesses know that investments in workplace health can yield big dividends: $1 invested in health returns up to $6 in productivity. As a major employer, our government will play a leadership role in pioneering and sharing healthy workplace ideas. We will also partner with private sector businesses to expand healthy practices across Ontario.
Healthy schools

We will help kids stay healthy through mandatory daily physical activity in schools.

Our kids spend three to five hours per day in front of the television and approximately 26 hours per week sitting in the classroom. Small wonder that childhood obesity in Ontario doubled between 1981 and 1997.

We will work to make our elementary school students more active and healthy by ensuring that each day they receive a minimum of 20 minutes of cardiovascular activity. We will also set a strong example on nutrition by banning the sale of junk food in our elementary schools.

Success Story: Thames Valley School Board

In 1998, the Thames Valley School Board made daily physical activity mandatory in 19 schools. Many of these schools had no gym and none had a full-time phys-ed teacher. Regular teachers led activities, often in the classroom. Today, students in each of the board’s 156 elementary schools get at least 20 minutes of daily physical activity. The initiative has reduced violence on the playground, improved learning and taught children the importance of staying active.

Protection from life-threatening allergies

We will provide public schools with guidelines on how to treat a child in anaphylactic shock due to allergy.

The number of deaths caused by anaphylactic reactions to food is increasing every year. Without immediate attention, severely allergic children can die from anaphylactic shock. To protect children with life threatening allergies, we will require every school to develop an anaphylactic plan based on province-wide standards.
Healthy seniors

Our Seniors Strategy will focus on keeping seniors active and well.

We will expand seniors’ recreation centres to help seniors live healthy, productive lives at home. Our senior-friendly family health teams will work directly with pharmacists, who will help seniors maintain healthy drug management. Our enhancements to homecare will help seniors stay at home longer, by choice.

Sport and recreation

We will support community sport and recreation.

We know that sport and recreation keep us healthy and strengthen our communities. The Harris-Eves government slashed funding for community recreation. The effects of inactive living cost our health care system $1.1 billion every year. We will do more to support active living.

Healthy, Active Living is Important

- It is estimated that more than 7,000 Ontarians die prematurely every year due to obesity-related health problems.
- Statistics Canada has reported that obese Canadians are four times more likely to have diabetes and three times more likely to have high blood pressure.
- About 5% of total health care spending in Ontario goes to treating obesity-related illness.

Safe alternative health care

We will enhance protection for Ontarians who use non-traditional medicine.

There are many medical traditions in our diverse society. We will do more to ensure that those who choose to use alternative approaches can rely on evidence-based standards. Following the lead of provinces like BC and Quebec, we will start by regulating Traditional Chinese Medicine practitioners so that those who choose these treatments can have confidence in their safety.
Anti-smoking strategy

We will address the number one killer in Ontario with an aggressive plan to reduce smoking.

Nothing kills more Ontarians than smoking. Every year, 12,000 of us die from tobacco use. Smoking costs our health care system and economy nearly $4 billion in direct costs and lost productivity.

Our comprehensive anti-smoking strategy will help smokers quit smoking, prevent our kids from starting and help communities transition out of tobacco-based industry. Here’s how we will do it:

• **Real prevention.** Nothing prevents people from smoking better than increasing the cost of cigarettes. Ontario’s cigarettes are still cheaper than almost every other province. We will make cigarettes more expensive to prevent kids from lighting up.

• **Tougher Controls.** We will ban countertop and behind-the-counter retail displays of tobacco products.

• **Smoke-Free Public and Work Places.** We will make all public and work places in Ontario 100% smoke free within three years. Health is a provincial responsibility, so we will take the onus off municipal governments.

• **Helping Smokers Quit.** We will use increased tobacco tax revenue to make smoking cessation medications available to all smokers trying to quit.

• **Youth Talking to Youth.** We will create a peer-to-peer anti-smoking campaign targeted at youth and created by youth. Such programs have been very successful in other jurisdictions.

• **Transition for Communities.** We will establish a Community Transition Fund, also with increased tobacco tax revenue, to help farmers move away from growing tobacco. We will help communities move to a sustainable economic base.
AMO and OMA Call for Smoke-Free Workplaces and Public Places

In August 2000, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario asked the Harris-Eves government to enact uniform smoke-free workplace and public place rules. Since then, more and more municipalities have passed smoke-free workplace and public place bylaws.

After three years of government inaction, in 2003, the Ontario Medical Association also called upon the Harris-Eves government to pass smoke-free workplace and public place legislation.

Immunization and screening

We will make sure that you have access to vaccines and screening that work.

We will start by providing chicken pox and meningitis vaccines to children and colorectal cancer screening to adults over 50.

Immunization prevents illness. Every year, 890 of us are hospitalized and 234,000 work days are missed because of chickenpox. In 2001, 65 people became ill and eight people died from meningitis. We could prevent these diseases with a modest investment in vaccinations for children.

Proper screening can have the same positive effects. Each year, thousands are diagnosed with colorectal cancer, the second leading cause of cancer deaths. With proper screening, we could save hundreds of lives and millions of health care dollars.

Heart attack survival

We will provide better access to life-saving portable heart defibrillators.

When heart attack victims in full arrest have timely access to portable defibrillators, their chances of survival increase from 5% to 50%. We will set guidelines for the use of these life-saving devices and place them in all provincial buildings.
**Better public health**

We will give the Chief Medical Officer of Health real independence to protect you.

When contaminated drinking water killed seven Ontarians and made more than 2,300 seriously ill in Walkerton, it was a tragic reminder of the importance of public health.

Unlike the Harris-Eves government, we will not turn our back on public health. We will make sure public health officials are free to speak directly to Ontarians and act in your interest. We will make the Chief Medical Officer of Health an independent officer, rather than a government appointee. The Chief Medical Officer of Health will report to Ontarians annually on the state of the public health system.

**Clean air and water**

We will ensure cleaner air and safer water for Ontarians.

Air pollution kills 1,900 of us every year and many of us do not trust our water. Cleaning the air we breathe and the water we drink will go a long way to improving the health of all Ontarians. That is why we have committed to replace our coal-burning plants, Ontario’s biggest single sources of air pollution, with cleaner energy sources. And we will implement every recommendation of the Walkerton Report.

**Better jobs, healthier people**

We will grow Ontario’s economy and create opportunities for better health for all.

People who have affordable housing, good jobs and a decent living wage are much more likely to be healthy. Our plan to grow Ontario’s economy will create jobs, raise the minimum wage and provide more affordable housing.
you have a choice

A choice between a Harris-Eves government that will let some buy their way to the front of the health care line or a McGuinty Liberal government that will guarantee all Ontarians access to public medicare.

Between the failed policies of creeping privatization or leadership that will protect and improve medicare.

Between a leader and a party that are stuck in the past or leadership with a positive plan for the future.

Choose change. Choose the health care you need.

Choose Dalton McGuinty and the Ontario Liberals.

For more information visit:
www.ontarioliberal.com

The Ontario Liberal Party
10 St. Mary Street
Suite 210
Toronto, ON M4Y 1P9

e-mail:
info@ontarioliberal.com

To donate to the Ontario Liberals, call:
1-866-LIB-FUND/
416-260-1608
or online at:
www.ontarioliberalfund.com

Disponible en français

Printed on recycled paper, using environmentally friendly inks.