

## **Highlights from the ON Government’s “Plan for Connected and Convenient Care” February 10, 2023**

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Last week, the Ontario government released a document called *Your Health: A Plan for Connected and Convenient Care* (the Plan) ([source](#)).

The Plan focuses on improving health care by: connecting Ontarians to options that are more convenient and closer to home, shortening wait times for key services across the province, and increasing the number of healthcare workers ([source](#)).

It reads: “We are taking action to strengthen all aspects of healthcare, particularly where you access it most frequently — in hospital emergency rooms, in community settings like pharmacies and doctors’ offices, in Long-Term Care homes and through care delivered right in your own homes” ([source](#)).

The Plan includes many new changes, which are organized under three pillars:

1. The Right Care in the Right Place
2. Faster Access to Care, and
3. Hiring More Health Care Workers.

Some of the changes will be effective immediately, and others will be “phased in over the months and years ahead as we educate and graduate new health care workers, build new hospitals, community surgical and diagnostic centres and long-term care homes, and deliver care in new and innovative ways” ([source](#)).

This article outlines some of the major initiatives that are part of the Plan. Click [here](#) to read the original document, and click [here](#) to read the press release that announced it.

### **Pillar 1: The Right Care in the Right Place**

1. To free up more space in hospitals, Long-Term Care homes, and doctors’ offices, the provincial government is expanding home and community care so that Ontarians have the option to receive care at home ([source](#)). These investments will help nearly 700,000 families who rely on home care annually to connect to care more conveniently ([source](#)).

People with chronic health conditions can now live at home more independently and avoid regular visits to the hospital waiting room ([source](#)). Paramedics can care for

them at their homes ([source](#)). This program is already in place in 55 communities across Ontario ([source](#)). It has connected more than 30,000 people to 24/7 non-emergency support ([source](#)).

The Plan also mentions that “we need to do more to expand and improve home care services across the province, particularly in rural and remote areas. We will continue to make investments to ensure you and your family are able to connect to home care more quickly and easily, when you need support” ([source](#)).

2. As of January 1, 2023, pharmacists have been able to prescribe medications for 13 common health concerns to people across Ontario at no extra cost ([source](#)). Click [here](#) to read another North Yorkers’ article that explains this change in greater detail.

The government also shared an update that, as of January 29, 2023, nearly 40,000 assessments for minor health issues have been completed and over 31,000 prescriptions have been given ([source](#)). Across all public health units in Ontario, 65% of pharmacies have provided these expanded services, and that number is trending upwards ([source](#)).

3. The government is adding eight more Youth Wellness Hubs across the province in addition to the 14 that currently exist ([source](#)). These centres make it faster and easier for youth to connect to mental health and substance use support, primary care, social services and more ([source](#)).
4. Ontario Health Teams are being expanded, including adding up to 1,200 more physicians to family health organizations ([source](#)). This makes it easier for people to transition between various healthcare providers and ensure their health records follow them wherever they go to receive healthcare([source](#)).

## **Pillar Two: Faster Access to Care**

1. To address Ontario’s backlog of surgeries and procedures, which is estimated at approximately 206,000 cases, the province will be using privately-run surgical and diagnostic centres ([source](#), [source](#), 0:39). Click [here](#) to read another North Yorkers’ article that explains this change in greater detail.
2. To address the limited capacity and long wait times in Emergency Rooms, paramedics are now allowed to “treat people who call 9-1-1 at home or on scene in the community rather than in emergency rooms” ([source](#)). The provincial government reports that this has happened “in more than 40 communities across the province, resulting in patients receiving the care they needed up to 17 times faster with 94% of patients avoiding the emergency room in the days following treatment” ([source](#)).
3. To help address wait lists for Long-Term Care, the province built almost 60,000 new and upgraded long-term care beds ([source](#)). This is in addition to the more than 3,500 hospital beds added across the province in the last three years ([source](#)).

## **Pillar Three: Hiring More Healthcare Workers**

1. To expand medical school education, over the next five years, the provincial government will add 160 seats to undergraduate classrooms and 295 postgraduate positions ([source](#)).
2. The “Learn and Stay” grant is being expanded in “over a dozen growing and under-served communities” ([source](#)). This grant is covering the costs of tuition, books, and other direct educational costs for postsecondary students who enroll in high-priority programs, including nursing, medical laboratory sciences, and paramedic programs, in certain areas of the province ([source](#)). In return, graduates must work in those communities for up to two years after they graduate ([source](#)). Click [here](#) to read more.
3. Effective immediately, the new “As of Right” rules will allow health care workers who are registered to practice in other provinces and territories to start working and caring for people in Ontario ([source](#)). This means that healthcare workers will no longer be delayed by the administrative procedures involved in registering with one of Ontario’s health regulatory colleges, such as the College of Nurses of Ontario, before they can practice healthcare in Ontario ([source](#)). Click [here](#) to read more.

## **Final Thoughts**

The provincial government changed many parts of the healthcare system in a short period of time. Hopefully, this will make Ontario’s healthcare system less short-staffed and more accessible to the many people who have been waiting for years for necessary care.

The Plan ends with the following statements:

“To ensure we are building a system that works for you, Ontario will continuously measure our progress, including tracking your ability to access services like primary care and mental health care, wait times for MRI and CT scans, and time spent waiting in the emergency room.

We will also track how we are expanding our health care workforce to ensure it grows as our population in Ontario grows and ages.

Over the next several years, as we continue to rollout this Plan, we will remain focused on one thing: connecting you to the health care you need when you need it most” ([source](#)).

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If you think you may be experiencing symptoms of COVID-19, take the self-assessment at [www.ontario.ca/coronavirus](http://www.ontario.ca/coronavirus). Follow all directions from your medical provider or your local health unit at the following phone numbers:

Health Connect Ontario: 811

Telehealth Ontario: 1-866-797-0000

Toronto Public Health: 416-338-7600

Peel Public Health: 905-799-7700

Durham Region Health Department: 905-668-7711

York Region Public Health: 1-877-464-9675