

72% polled in Nipissing and Sault don't support PC health system overhaul

NORTH BAY, ON – Although just ten months ago voters in North Bay and Sault Ste. Marie elected Progressive Conservative (PC) MPPs, recent polling shows that 72% of respondents don't support the massive changes the PCs are planning to make to the province's health system.

Commissioned by the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Ontario and the CUPE's Ontario Council of Hospital Unions (OCHU/CUPE) the poll was conducted at the end of February. 552 people participated in North Bay (and surrounding areas) and Sault Ste. Marie – both PC held ridings.

"Ontarians deserve to be consulted about changes to the health system on this scale, which many agree will cause years of chaos for patients, and there was none. Now we have a law that's been rammed through the Legislature that allows Mr. Fedeli's PCs to move ahead with restructuring - which is the third health system overhaul in just over 20 years - with total disregard for what the people of communities like North Bay and Sault Ste. Marie, think. This poll shows they are not on board with any of that," says CUPE Ontario president Fred Hahn.

Nipissing and Sault Ste. Marie residents were asked whether they supported the PC plan to "restructure" hospitals (from 150 hospitals down to 30-50 mega-hospitals) and create a new "super agency" that would subsume care coordination done through local health networks and the province's highly regarded Cancer Care Ontario. The poll also probed whether there was support for privatization of several health services and whether respondents thought this kind of restructuring would save any money.

Only respondents who completed the poll in its entirety have been included in the data findings, which include the following:

- 75% don't agree that Ontario's 150 hospitals should be merged into 30-50 super-hospitals;
- 76% don't think that merging hospitals, long-term care and other providers will end hallway health care at their community hospital;
- 72% don't support the proposed PC plans to restructure health care;
- 77% don't think that Ontario needs another level of bureaucracy in the form of a super agency;
- 74% don't think adding a new centralized bureaucracy (super agency) will save money;
- 73% don't support using for-profit corporations to provide health care services;
- 65% don't support increasing privatized delivery of home care;
- 61% don't think merging health care providers will save the province money.

"Privatization of clinical and support services is at the heart of this government's restructuring," says Michael Hurley, OCHU president. "Ultimately our members will do what needs to be done to protect the services that they deliver. Starting with a sticker day by health care workers across Ontario against privatization on April 23 and a major rally in Toronto on April 30, the staff of hospitals and long-term and community care will begin the mobilization of public opinion in support of publicly delivered health care."

About 250 leaders from CUPE's hospital sector are holding their annual convention in North Bay, this week and they will be joining a rally on Wednesday at 12:00 noon at Vic Fedeli's constituency office, 165 Main St. E. A provincial rally opposing the PC health care restructuring is planned for April 30 at Queen's Park.

Similar polls were conducted in PC held ridings across Ontario. Those poll findings will be released throughout April and May.

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