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Government Backs Down on Prescription Increases for Seniors

By Silvia Jones, MPP

Dufferin-Caledon

When the provincial government introduced the 2016 Ontario Budget on February 25 there were changes announced to our province's health care system, including changes to drug benefits for seniors.

While the government's announcement for increasing funding for hospitals by one per cent, as well as providing funding for community-based residential hospices and palliative care, are a step in the right direction, there is still a significant lack of resources provided for our province's seniors.

In Ontario, there are 24,000 seniors on a waitlist for a nursing bed, and that will double to 50,000 in just six years.

60,000 seniors with Alzheimer's are in need of an in-home Behavioural Support team. In addition, there are some 150 smaller long-term care homes across small and rural communities that need better resources to ensure safe staffing levels.

Unfortunately, the government continues to prioritize giving raises to CEOs, such as Central West CCAC's CEO receiving an $8,078.86 raise last year for a total of $279,242.88, rather than having a plan to address the lack of resources for our province's most vulnerable citizens.

Not only is there a significant lack of support for our province's seniors, but the government announced changes to the Ontario Drug Benefit program that would have made it more expensive for seniors to purchase necessary prescriptions.

These changes include increasing the annual Ontario Drug Benefit Program deductible from $100 to $170 ? an increase of 70 per cent. Additionally, for every trip to the pharmacy, the prescription co-payment will be increased from $6.11 to $7.11.

As a result of these changes, nearly all seniors would see their prescription costs rise.Organizations including the Canadian Association of Retired Persons (CARP) have raised concerns that the changes would have a serious impact on lives of our province's most vulnerable citizens.

After growing opposition, including petitions calling on the government to stop their plan, the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care on April 4 backed down on the changes to senior's drug benefits.

I want to thank the more than 200 individuals who signed my petition at this year's Orangeville Home and Garden Show, calling on the government to not go forward with these changes.

This goes to show that your input in this important issue can make a difference, and help prevent the government from going forward with a poorly thought out decision.

I will to continue, along with my PC colleagues, to hold this government accountable to ensure that prescriptions are affordable and that our province's senior's receive the support they deserve.