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Export date: Fri Oct 30 9:39:39 2026 / +0000 GMT

Government not in it for seniors

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When the provincial government introduced the 2016 Ontario Budget on February 25 there were changes announced that will have a serious impact on seniors living in Ontario.

Some of these changes are a step in the right direction, while others will have a negative effect that will make life harder for our province's growing and aging population.

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 will make 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 will see their prescription costs nearly double.

Seniors continue to be gouged by the government, whether it is skyrocketing energy rates or cuts to physiotherapy services, and now the government wants to make prescriptions even more expensive, while many seniors live on a fixed income.

Organizations, including the Canadian Association of Retired Persons (CARP) have raised concerns that the changes will have a serious impact on lives of our province's most vulnerable citizens.

With these changes, the government continues to show they are not in it for seniors in Ontario.

It is unacceptable that after 13 years in power, the Liberal government remains unprepared to meet the health care needs of our growing and aging population.

My Progressive Conservative Caucus colleagues and I will continue to pursue these priority issues with the government and demand they address the growing gap between the patients' needs, staffing and care levels across the province.