



ONTARIO CITIZENS
CANCER COALITION



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ONTARIO PARTY LEADERS' MESSAGE TO CANCER PATIENTS: KEEP WAITING

None will commit to bringing Ontario to parity with BC on full funding for newer cancer drugs, or to parity with Quebec on funding for PET scans

Toronto, September 26, 2007 – Ontarians take note: leaders from all three major parties have failed to commit to bringing Ontario to parity with British Columbia on full funding for new intravenous cancer drugs, and to parity with Quebec on funding for PET scans.

As part of “Vote for Access,” a grass-roots campaign launched by the Ontario Citizens Cancer Coalition with support from CARP, Canada’s Association for the Fifty-Plus, letters were sent to the three leaders on September 11, asking for such a commitment. Ontario ranks second worst in Canada when it comes to fully funding 24 of the newer intravenous cancer drugs approved by Health Canada (BC, the leader, fully funds 20 while Ontario fully funds only four). Ontario also ranks dead last among Canadian provinces in funding PET scan imaging (Quebec, the leader, funded 209 PET scans per 100,000 population in 2006, while Ontario funded just six).

The letter gave a one-week deadline for response. Both the NDP and the Liberals responded prior to the September 18 deadline. The PC Party, however, did not respond until September 21, after several follow-up phone calls from CARP and OCCC.

The two-paragraph response from the NDP stated, “The Ontario NDP is committed to fair access to health care for all Ontarians...” but gave no details.

The two-page PC response dealt more specifically with cancer-fighting drugs and PET scans, but only to criticize the Liberal government’s record. There were no specific commitments of performance if the PCs are elected.

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The lengthiest response – four pages – came from the Liberal party, and it was also the only response signed by its leader. The letter detailed improvements the government has made in the treatment of cancer, noting that funding for new cancer drugs has increased, and estimating that under the current formulas, PET scan funding would double in the coming year. But as with the other responses, there was no commitment to bring Ontario to parity with BC on fully funding intravenous cancer drugs, or Quebec on PET scan funding.

“We were very disappointed with the responses,” said Holly Vengroff, director of external relations for CARP. “We made two very straightforward demands, and all we received were good intentions. All three leaders have been talking about their commitment to health care on the campaign trail, but none of them seem to be willing to be accountable for measurable results.”

“The responses show that the politicians seem to be content to have Ontario rank at or near the bottom, compared to other provinces,” said Antonia Codispoti, co-founder of the Ontario Citizens Cancer Coalition. “Therefore, our volunteers will be demonstrating outside election meetings in selected ridings, informing voters of the facts. Perhaps the candidates will be more forthcoming than their leaders.”

The ridings targeted for action are Mississauga South, Vaughan, Etobicoke Lakeshore, Peterborough and Sault Ste. Marie. Other ridings may be added to the list as the number of volunteers increases.

Concerned citizens who wish to join the fight to demand for better cancer care for Ontarians can find more information on www.nomorewaiting.info.

The full responses of each party can be read on www.nomorewaiting.info.

About newer intravenous cancer drugs

Statistics about funding of 24 newer intravenous cancer drugs, and the comparative performance of all 10 Canadian provinces, are taken from the Report Card on Cancer in Canada, 2006, from the Cancer Advocacy Coalition.

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About PET scans

Positron Emission Tomography, also called PET imaging or a PET scan, is a diagnostic examination used to evaluate a variety of diseases. PET scans are used most often to detect cancer and to examine the effects of cancer therapy.

About OCCC

The Ontario Citizens Cancer Coalition (OCCC) was founded by Antonia Codispoti and Hilda Mackow to advocate for better access to life-saving cancer drugs and PET scans for Ontarians. The OCCC is funded entirely by its members and concerned citizens and receives no funds from any other organization.

About CARP

Founded in 1984, CARP, Canada's Association for the Fifty-Plus, is a non-profit national organization representing close to 400,000 members. Its mandate, to promote and protect the rights and quality of life of mature adults through the development of practical recommendations on policy, works for the benefit of over 11 million Canadians aged 50 plus.

CARP actively works with government on policy initiatives, providing information and policy recommendations on key political, economic and social issues.

CARP also provides value-added benefits on products and services for its members. CARP publishes a magazine and, through Fifty-Plus.Net Inc., produces a web site (www.carp.ca) and electronic newsletter.

CARP is supporting the OCCC and the "Vote for Access" campaign by incorporating the campaign into its existing health care reform initiative, "No More Waiting" (www.nomorewaiting.info). CARP has devoted a portion of its ongoing radio advertising program to the "Vote for Access" campaign, and has also funded certain campaign costs, such as printing and media relations.

CARP does not receive operating funds from any levels of government.