

ONTARIO LIBERALS DEMAND PCS ACT ON HOSPITAL PROTESTS

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Following days of demonstrations outside Ontario hospitals, the provincial Liberals are calling on Premier Doug Ford to take tougher action on pandemic protesters.

The party released a "plan to mandate safety" on Sept. 14 and addressed a letter to Ford the next day urging him to adopt the measures laid out in the plan and meet with Ontario's chiefs of police and opposition leaders to discuss other potential solutions to the problem of conspiracy theory and anti-vaccine protest groups.

"When angry mobs assemble outside our hospitals, it's time to say enough. Vulnerable cancer patients are being exposed to the angry unvaccinated, our exhausted front-line health-care heroes are being intim-

idated, and acts of aggression are occurring at an increasingly alarming rate across the province," reads the letter signed by Ontario Liberal Party leader Steven Del Duca.

"The vaccinated majority are rightly discouraged and dismayed by these developments as case numbers continue to climb, and need to see strong leadership to combat radicalization."

The province has not taken any formal steps to address protests outside health-care facilities, but Deputy Premier Christine Elliott condemned the actions of demonstrators as "unfortunate" during an update on the province's last mile vaccination strategy on Sept. 14.

"This is very demoralizing to our front-line health-care workers who have been working flat out to save people's lives for the last 18

months," Elliott said. "It's just very unfortunate that this is happening with the protesters, and we would ask them to please think about the great work our front-line health-care workers are doing and please stop these protests."

The plan calls on the province to adopt the following measures:

PROMOTING VACCINE ACCEPTANCE AND COMBATING MISINFORMATION

The plan calls on Ford to convene a meeting on the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police to discuss how to "protect communities from anti-vax abuse, harassment, violence and blocked access to services" while ensuring the right to public assembly is also protected. It also asks for the establishment of temporary exclusion zones around hospital entrances to help patients and staff move more freely in and out of hospi-



Richard Lautens photo

Approximately 100 anti-vaccine protesters recently gathered in front of Toronto General Hospital, as others had done at other hospitals across Ontario and at Queen's Park.

tals.

It calls for the province to work with the federal government to counter misinformation and disinformation regarding vaccines and the pandemic, invest in public health education and outreach for communities where vaccine confidence is low, and add requirements for the use of COVID-19 vaccine certificates as a regulation under the Emergency

Act.

STRENGTHENING VACCINE MANDATES

The plan challenges Ford to remove "testing loopholes" for those without medical or Ontario Human Rights Code exemptions in vaccine mandates for health care and education workers; mandate vaccines on all provincially regulated trains and buses, for both passengers and operators;

mandate vaccines for all employees of workplaces where customers are required to be vaccinated; and provide workers with 10 provincially funded paid sick days.

It also calls on Ford to mandate vaccines for students born in 2009 or earlier and establish public health unit vaccine programs in every school.

PREPARING FOR THE NEXT PHASE OF THE PANDEMIC

The plan asks Ford to make pandemic recovery investments, including an increase in funding to colleges and universities to expand health-care programs, increased access to at-home testing for all Ontarians and increased support for COVID-19 burdened hospitals.

It also calls for a comprehensive plan for the mass immunization of children born after 2009 and a revised timeline for increased capacities under the new vaccine certificate guideline, as well as additional financial support for small businesses.

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