

# Social funds don't match growth, study says

From page 1.

Services Planning Coalition, the Peel Fair Share Task Force and the GTA/905 Healthcare Alliance. The alliance includes 10 hospitals from across the GTA including York Central, Markham-Stouffville and Southlake.

It is an update of the Growing Pains report released in October, 2006. Both audits have shown residents of the Toronto's suburbs are not getting their fair share of operating funding for much-needed services.

What that means for you is longer wait times at hospitals and for other services. It also means residents either have to leave their communities to get services or simply go without.

"I think the report essentially tells us what our network of United Way agencies has known for some time," United Way of York Region CEO Daniele Zanotti said.

The United Way works with 40 agencies and Mr. Zanotti said the lack of resources is being seen across the board.

"We are seeing the funding gap on the ground in a whole bunch of ways," he said.

What's worse, the gap is widening. In two years, the funding gap for all social services increased nearly 34 per cent, to \$708.2 million.

Our hospitals are in even more dire straits, receiving only 76.5 per cent of what other regions receive.

Overall, this means local hospitals are nearly \$1 billion short of the funding they require.

"There is still a sizable gap ... and the gaps are getting wider as population growth continues to outstrip provincial funding," the report concludes.

Mr. Zanotti said a huge investment would be needed up-front to eliminate the gap, as would extensive ongoing funding.

"As the report so clearly states, the pace of growth is so exceedingly rapid, it's a game of catch-up," Mr. Zanotti said.

However, the CEO of the Central Local Health Integration Network, which includes most of York Region, says funding to his group is starting to bridge recognized gaps. Hi Eliasoph said the recent Liberal commitment for an aging at home strategy, to ease hospital patient congestion and lack of bed spaces, is a sign of better

funding allocation.

Earlier this year, York Region passed its second motion asking the upper levels of government to step in and bridge the funding gap, to no avail. The motion asked for a change in how funding is allocated and while that has not yet happened, it is something the Progressive Conservatives are touting in the campaign.

*Is there more to do?  
You're darn right  
there is more to do.*

Party leader John Tory has promised to invest \$8.5 billion in the health care system over four years, including growth funding earmarked for regions such as the 905. According to his platform, that funding would grow to \$200 million per year by 2011-12.

"The communities surrounding the City of Toronto are growing at twice the rate of most communities in Ontario, but there has been little recognition from the McGuinty government about the impact this is having on local health care," Mr. Tory said.

"People living in all parts of Ontario have the right to access quality health care services as close to home as possible."

Mr. Tory said he would also create a new, population-based funding model for Local Health Integration Networks that plan health-care funding.

The Liberals are quick to criticize that plan.

"I'm not satisfied with moving on a provincewide basis to per-capita funding," Finance Minister and Vaughan MPP Greg Sorbara said.

Mr. Sorbara pointed out stable areas with low growth could find themselves suddenly lacking and he said the government has been working with the coalition over the past few years to find out where funding is needed.

He said the coalition's figures don't take into account much of the government's infrastructure investments, including a new hospital in Brampton and planning for a Vaughan hospital.

The Liberals have also pledged to create more funding for hospitals in high growth areas in their platform.

But the Conservatives are focused on the speed of change.

"It's going to be something that needs to immediately happen," said Elizabeth Witmer, Conservative health critic and former cabinet minister.

She said Mr. Tory and herself had already met with the coalition, prompting their promise to provide funding.

Beyond the \$200 million now on the table, a Tory government would continue to work to resolve the issues, Ms Witmer added.

"We are prepared to make sure they [high-growth municipalities] get a fair share of the funding," she said.

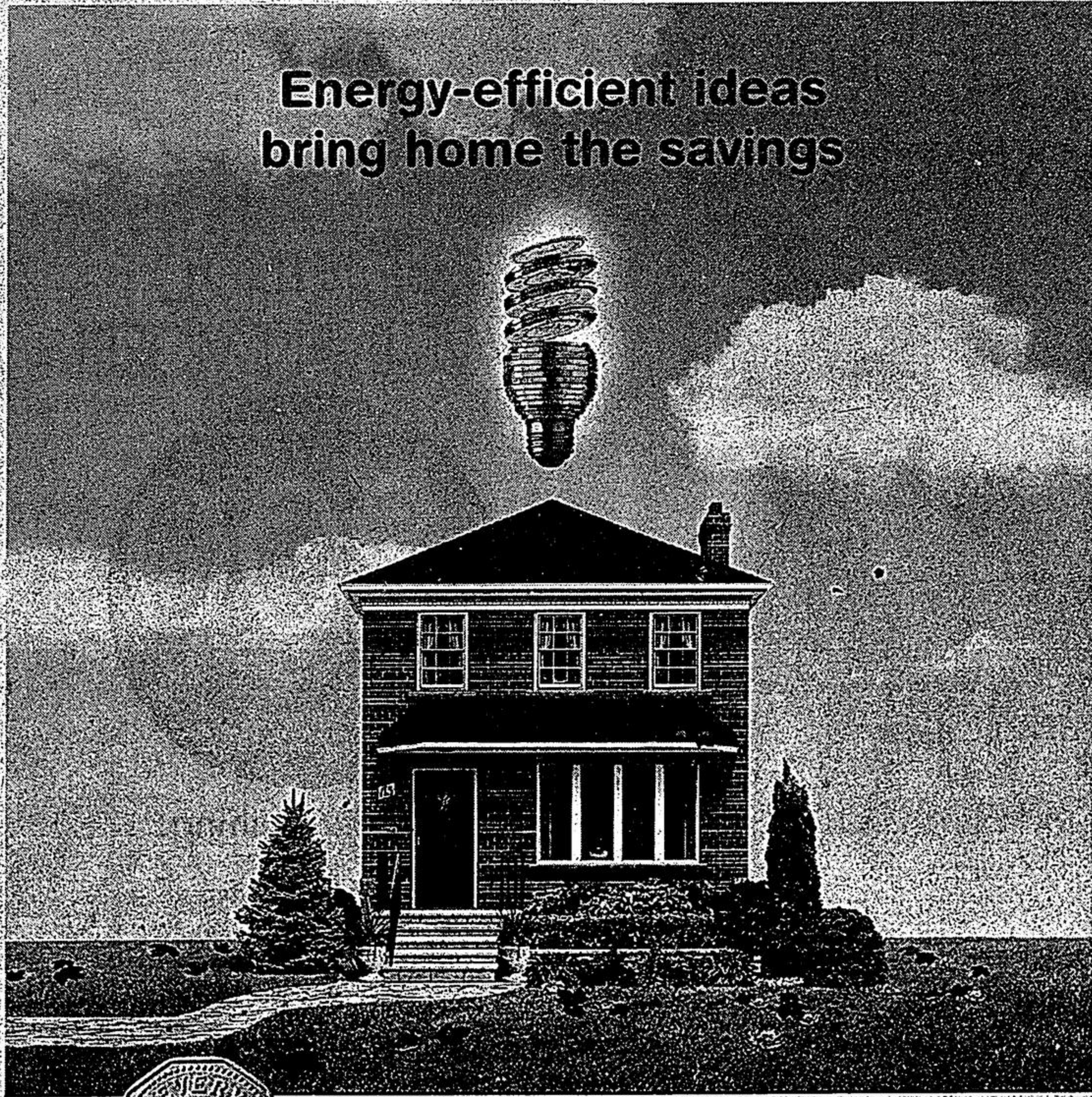
The NDP also see the need for improvements to allocating funding to health care.

"There's no doubt there's a problem," Newmarket-Aurora NDP candidate Mike Seaward said.

While praising the work of social agencies, Mr. Seaward said "these core issues should be funded out of the public purse."

He said raising the minimum wage to \$10 would help and hoped local residents would remember it was a Conservative government that exacerbated the problems by downloading social services to municipalities.

—With files from David Stell



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