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McGUINTY GOVERNMENT APPOINTS MEMBERS OF HEPATITIS C TASK FORCE *Chair, 16-Member Panel To Examine Hepatitis C Prevention And Treatment*

TORONTO – The McGuinty government is appointing 16 members to the Hepatitis C Task Force to advise the government on how to improve hepatitis C prevention and treatment, Health and Long-Term Care Minister George Smitherman announced today.

“I am delighted that the task force, chaired by John Plater, President of Hemophilia Ontario, will get down to providing advice to the government on strategies to improve hepatitis C treatment, prevention, education and support in Ontario,” said Smitherman.

The members of the task force are: Keith Berry, Community Representative; Debbie Breau, Unified Network of Drug Users; Dr. Gary Garber, Ottawa Hospital; Dr. Jenny Heathcote, Toronto Western Hospital; Paul Lavigne, Ottawa Public Health; Lynne Leonard, University of Ottawa; Dr. Leonard Moore, Family Physician; Jeff Ostofsky, City of Toronto Public Health; Billie Potkonjak, Canadian Liver Foundation; Susan Price, Hepatitis C Network of Windsor and Essex County; Joe Rinella, Hepatitis C Society of Canada; Alan Simpson, YOUTHLINK Inner City; Lynette Tobin, AIDS Niagara; Colina Yim, Toronto Western Hospital; Donald Young, Thunder Bay District Health Unit; and Art Zocole, Two-Spirited People of the First Nations.

Appointments were effective April 1, 2005. All members have been asked to serve a minimum two-year term, with a maximum term lasting three years, at which time membership of the task force will be reviewed.

"The minister has appointed an excellent group of people to the task force; they represent the diversity of expertise and understanding it will take to respond to hepatitis C," said Plater. "The groundwork we lay starting today will not only be of benefit to people living with hepatitis C, but will also reduce the number of Ontarians contracting hepatitis C in the future."

Today's announcement fulfils the commitments made by Smitherman last October as part of an action plan to improve hepatitis C care and prevention. The action plan includes:

- Establishing a Hepatitis C Task Force chaired by John Plater to advise the government on strategies to improve the prevention and treatment of hepatitis C
- Creating a Hepatitis C Secretariat within the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to support the task force.

The task force's first meeting will take place within the next four to six weeks.

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