

## ONTARIO'S EMERGENCY ROOM STRATEGY

February 19, 2009

Reducing the time patients spend in emergency rooms (ER) is a complex issue that requires improvements throughout the entire health system. That is why Ontario is taking a comprehensive approach to reducing the amount of time patients are spending in emergency rooms. The strategy includes:

**Providing Ontarians appropriate alternatives to the ER** – supporting patients with chronic conditions, creating more family health teams and nurse practitioner clinics, and enhancing public awareness of alternative health care options will help to ease pressures across the system. Some of these initiatives include:

- Public education, with emphasis on alternatives to the ER. The new Your Health Care Options website – [www.ontario.ca/healthcareoptions](http://www.ontario.ca/healthcareoptions) – is a one-stop source of information that will enable Ontarians to make informed decisions about where to go for immediate care in their communities.
- Health Care Connect – an innovative, made-in-Ontario program devoted to helping Ontarians without a family health care provider find one in their community. Ontarians can call 1-800-445-1822 to register.
- A comprehensive four year strategy to prevent, manage and treat diabetes.
- Long Term Care Nurse Outreach Teams – teams of nurse practitioners and registered nurses provide residents of long-term care homes timely and appropriate care and provide interventions in cases where unnecessary visits to the hospital and ER can be avoided.

**Increasing capacity and improving performance within the ER** – programs and initiatives include:

- Hospital Performance Fund – an incentive program that is designed to improve performance at 23 hospital ERs facing the greatest challenges. LHINs work with local hospitals and community health care partners to help hospitals improve their ER access and reduce the time patients spend in the ER.
- Process Improvement Programs – programs to help hospitals improve processes and patient flow in the ERs. The programs, which include specialized coaching teams to visit all hospitals, will provide staff the ability to quickly diagnose flow problems and then help implement new processes that improve patient flow.
- Dedicated nurses to ease ambulance offload - Funding has been provided to put in place nurses dedicated to care for patients who arrive by ambulance. This allows paramedics to return more quickly to the community and be able to respond to other calls.
- Measuring and reporting the time patients spend in ERs – collecting information, reporting the time people spend in the ER on a public website, measuring and rewarding improved performance, so that Ontarians can see the steady progress being made.

**Speeding the flow of patients from the ER** – close to 19 per cent of patients who are currently in a hospital bed in Ontario are in need of an alternate level of care (ALC), such as a long-term care bed or a rehabilitation care bed. An ALC patient occupying an acute care bed can create a domino effect in hospitals when there are no other beds available, causing people to spend a longer time in the ER. That's why the government is investing in a number of initiatives that are working to relieve the ALC pressures in Ontario hospitals. In 2008/09, the government has invested:

- \$94 million as part of the Aging at Home Strategy – an unprecedented four-year, \$1.1 billion initiative to provide support to seniors and their caregivers to stay healthy and live with dignity and independence
- \$38.5 million for increased home care, personal support and homemaking services and enhanced integration between hospitals and Community Care Access Centres
- \$22 million in new priority funding for Ontario's 14 Local Health Integration Networks (LHINs) to invest in local solutions to further address ALC pressures

The government is adding 1,750 new long-term care home beds in selected communities across the province.

**For public inquiries call ServiceOntario, INFOline at 1-866-532-3161 (Toll-free in Ontario only)**

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