

Ontario Hospital Association HealthAchieve Conference

Speech delivered by the **Hon. Deb Matthews,**
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Check against delivery

Good morning.

My goodness, there are a lot of you here...

...which raises the question – who's staffing our hospitals right now? And should I be concerned?

Tom assures me that everything is well in hand.

I want to thank Tom for his leadership in our health system and for hosting us all again this year.

And Senator Dallaire -- what a moving speech. It's an honour to share the stage with you. On behalf of all Canadians, thank you for your leadership.

And I want to congratulate Peter Johnson on his appointment as Board Chair of the OHA.

Peter and I go way back – we grew up in London together and I look forward to working with him over the coming year.

He'll be taking over from Kevin Smith – Kevin, you've done a wonderful job as chair of the OHA and have contributed so much to making our health care system stronger.

Before I go any further, I want to take a second to recognize all the people who made this meeting of the minds possible.

From the organizers to the speakers and everyone working or volunteering at this conference — I think they all deserve a big round of applause.

Same goes for everyone involved in this afternoon's Innovations Expo....

I love this event and I'm really looking forward to taking a tour and learning more about your groundbreaking work.

To everyone in this room — thank you all for taking the time to be here today.

It's important for us to come together – especially in this time of change – to exchange ideas and think about the future of this great healthcare system of ours.

So thank you for coming. Thank you for learning about how to keep on getting better...working more collaboratively.

You're proving to me that you are part of the solution...

...That, like me, you're determined to be part of the change that will ensure that we not only provide the best possible care for people today...

...but that our precious, universal healthcare system will be there for our kids and our grandkids...

...that it's a gift that we can pass on to the next generation.

I've been Minister of Health and Long-term Care just over a year now.

And my respect for people who work in health care has only grown.

You're a passionate bunch...

...You love what you do because you do it for the right reasons. For patients...

...for the 13 million people in this province who know that the health care system is there for them if they need it.

You know, I'm one of those 13 million people.

And when my daughter Toby gave birth to the world's most adorable, but premature, twins back in June, I dropped everything — I literally ran out of a cabinet meeting — to be by her side.

I didn't walk through the doors of Trillium Health Centre as health minister.

I walked — okay, I ran — through the doors, just like any other Ontarian...

...as a mother, anxious to know my daughter was okay...

...and as a grandmother, excited to meet the newest members of my family, and worried that they had arrived too early.

Now I'm watching those babies grow and thrive, and I'm so very grateful for the care they – and my daughter and my son-in-law – received.

Just like I'm so very grateful for the care you gave my mom when she suffered a stroke just a few weeks ago...

You made sure the health care system was there to take care of my family...Of the people I love.

But the care my family got was the care that any Ontarian would have received. And it was excellent.

Because that's what Ontario's health care professionals do. Provide excellent care.

So on behalf of all 13 million of us Ontarians...

...thank you.

We — government and people who work in health care — have come a long way together since our election in 2003, seven years ago.

Very simply, our health care system is so very much better now than it was when we started.

It's better for patients.

It's better for health care workers.

It's stronger...more innovative...more responsive...more resilient.

Let me remind you how far we've come.

Here's a headline from the *Toronto Star* from 2000.

"ER crisis rivals worst ever in GTA; 22 hospitals turn away ambulances as crunch hits 3rd day in a row."

22 of 25 hospitals, turning away ambulances.

You don't see headlines like that today.

Our ERs aren't perfect, but they're now seeing 85 per cent of patients within the targets we set.

And Ontarians are getting in and out of ERs faster, each and every day.

Wait times for surgeries are improving too...

...because now we're measuring them, tracking them, publicly reporting them and making strategic investments to bring them down.

Now, that's accountability. That's transparency.

In fact, today, our MPPs are out celebrating Ontario's top 10 surgical wait time improvements.

My jaw dropped when I took a look at the # 1 improvement in the province...

...since we started measuring, Sudbury Regional Hospital has cut wait times for knee surgery by 774 days, or more than TWO years.

Think of what that means for a patient's quality of life.

We have other good stories to tell, too.

Since we took office, one million more Ontarians have access to primary care.

Back in 2001, the *Windsor Star* trumpeted this headline:

"Area has fewest family MDs; Maclean's ranks Windsor last in country for family doctor access"

And Windsor wasn't the only area of the province struggling with this problem...

So we rolled up our sleeves, and we went to work.

We created nurse practitioner-led clinics.

We added family health teams.

We expanded medical school spaces

Trained more international medical graduates.

We opened a new medical school...

And we actively recruited doctors from the United States...

...in fact, we've reversed the brain drain: there are now more doctors moving north than heading south.

The result? Last month, in the very same paper that delivered the bad news in 2001, the headline read:

“Wanted: Patients; Doctors are open for business.”

That’s right: we actually have doctors looking for patients in some parts of this province.

That’s progress...but we’re not done yet.

We’ve been transforming our health care system...

...And you’ve all been such a big part of that transformation.

Over the past year, I’ve met some extraordinary health care workers...who are accomplishing things few Ontarians would have dreamed possible seven years ago.

There was Sammy Ibrahim – a nurse practitioner in Niagara Falls, who is leading the charge to open the city’s first nurse practitioner-led clinic.

There’s Dr. Glenn Bauman, a radiologist from London.

He can now read a patient’s diagnostic test results from any hospital in the southwest with the click of a mouse. Almost instantly.

This is just part of our eHealth strategy showing results.

And finally, there’s Effie, a case manager with the Toronto CCAC.

She’s dedicated. Determined. Young. Vivacious. Capable.

And, like many of you, she’s helping us transform the way we deliver health care.

I know, because she showed me.

Back in the summer, Effie introduced me to Keith Cooper.

Keith lives in a bachelor apartment in downtown Toronto and was kind enough to have me over for breakfast.

Keith just turned 80...he was born in this city and spent much of his life working as a paramedic.

He makes quite the impression...

When I first met him he told me about his love of peanut butter and cheese sandwiches.

Years ago, Keith had a stroke.

And, eventually, his health deteriorated so much that he couldn't take care of himself on his own.

He had to move to long-term care.

But, while he got the care he needed, it wasn't where he wanted to be.

He wanted to be at home, living independently.

Eating peanut butter and cheese sandwiches whenever he felt like it.

That's where Effie and the CCAC came in.

With funding from our government's four-year 1.1 billion dollar Aging at Home program, the Toronto Central LHIN worked with the CCAC to move Keith out of long term care...

...and get him settled back home.

They wrapped support around him — now, he has a personal support worker who visits him twice a day...

...He has a family doctor...

...A nurse practitioner helped him find new glasses.

He's getting the care he needs.

Our health care system was able to transition Keith out of long-term care and into the community.

That frees up a long-term care bed.

That, in turn, might mean an ALC patient can be discharged from hospital.

And that means that a woman who may have just walked into that hospital with pneumonia, for example, is going to be admitted far more quickly.

There's a domino effect to everything we do....

...and a good rationale for investing more in community-based care.

The LHINs tell me Keith's story is one we're going to hear more and more...

...because we're building the supports outside hospitals.

And our health care system is starting to work as a system.

It's better integrated.

And our LHINs are spearheading that integration.

We have come a long way....a very long way from the days when 22 Toronto hospital ERs were on bypass.

We chose a path, made commitments and strategic investments...

Including investments outside the health care system.

We haven't forgotten about the social determinants of health.

Just recently, a paediatrician told me that he's seeing healthier kids as a result of the Ontario Child Benefit.

But we still have our challenges. You know them as well as I do. There's:

- ALC
- Mental health
- Disease prevention

In short, we have work to do.

But it hasn't been easy.

Our economy took a tumble in 2008.

And, as a government, we had to adapt, innovate and make some tough decisions.

But we didn't compromise on health care.

We have had the courage to carry on strengthening our system.

We found a way to increase funding for health care by over 6 per cent, this year over last.

But health care now takes up 46 cents of every program dollar we spend.

In 12 years, if left unchecked, it could take up 70 cents of every program dollar.

We can't keep this rate of growth going.

But we're not going to slash spending either...

Other governments have tried that before and we know it doesn't work.

We're going to keep on spending more on health care every year, but we simply must slow down the rate of increase.

That's why we've been taking a good hard look our health care system and making some important decisions.

We believe that the way to bring health care spending in line with revenue growth is to focus on three things – evidence, quality, and integration.

The three go hand in hand.

You see, we have an obligation to make sure that we are getting the best possible value for every single dollar we spend on health care.

That's why we took swift action to lower the price of generic drugs.

Taxpayers, businesses, and Ontarians who pay for their drugs out of pocket were paying too much...

...and they weren't getting value for that money.

So we decided to bring those prices down...

...and committed to reinvesting all the money we saved back into the health care system.

Lowering the cost of generic drugs wasn't easy – you may recall that there were some who opposed us – but we did it because it was the right thing to do.

Now we're getting higher quality pharmacy services and better value for our tax dollars.

That's the ultimate goal.

And that's precisely why we passed our *Excellent Care for All Act*.

I was very happy to hear Tom Closson say that this Act...

"...could be the single most important piece of health care legislation since the creation of our publicly-funded health care system."

That's pretty high praise.

Excellent Care for All puts the patient at the centre of the health care system.

It ensures that we're accountable to them, that we're improving quality of care for them.

Because poor quality care is also very expensive care. If we don't get it right the first time, not only does the patient suffer, but the system suffers too.

I know many of our hospital partners are in the process of implementing this act...

...you're creating quality committees...

...and talking to your local communities about how you can improve the patient experience.

We're working at it too.

As part of the Act, we told Ontarians we are going to rely more on evidence to drive decision-making.

That's why we're expanding the role of the Ontario Health Quality Council.

We want the OHQC to lead us forward, help us drive change and realign the system around our quality goals.

We're building on their success with the Residents First program in the long-term care sector...

...and asking the OHQC to apply the same quality formula to our hospitals, as a first step.

We can get there...

...with a reliance on evidence...

...with a real commitment to tracking and publicly reporting meaningful quality indicators...

...and with strong leadership both from our hospitals and from the OHQC.

We're doing important work.

And we're doing our best to do it as thoughtfully as possible.

We're making our health care system sustainable, driving value and improving quality at the same time...

...while ensuring patients are getting the care they need, where and when they need it.

Now there are some at Queen's Park who will tell you we're on the wrong track. That we're spending too much on health care.

That integration doesn't matter.

But they're the ones who thought there were too many doctors and medical school spaces...

...who fired nurses and closed hospitals...

...who couldn't be bothered to measure wait times...

...let alone bring them down.

And they're the ones who now say they want to cut 3 billion dollars out of health care.

That's equivalent to clawing back every single dollar from every single hospital in Northern Ontario.

Ontarians remember big health care cuts.

I don't want to go down that road again...

Because Ontarians deserve better than that.

You, our health care professionals, deserve better than that.

And we have worked too hard, for too long, to stand for that.

Next year, you'll be back here at Health Achieve and you'll hear from a minister of health.

I want that minister of health to be me.

Because we've got the momentum going...

...and we're not done yet.

So thank you for working with me.

And thank you for making a difference, for going the extra mile...

...for putting patients first.

And, if you've ever doubted the impact you're having, I want to leave you with a reminder.

I recently read a remarkable book by Wayson Choy, the award-winning Canadian author.

Wayson suffered a combined asthma-heart attack some years ago and nearly died.

He spent a lot of time in Toronto hospitals, recovering ever so slowly.

And he wrote about his experience in a book called *Not Yet*.

In some ways, it's a tribute to the health care system we all have contributed something to.

There's a passage in *Not Yet* that I want to share with you today...

...because it recognizes the impact you have on patients.

It describes a moment when Wayson was discouraged....

...When he was losing his determination to continue with the hard work of recovery and rehabilitation.

But then, he had a realization. Wayson writes:

"I had trusted dozens of unseen hands, expert and ordinary, to deliver me from the dark.

And what of all those unknown persons who handle the paperwork...

...the record keepers and accountants...

...what of those who clean and cook, wash and scrub...

...those who deal with the politics of running a hospital?

I had been saved by invisible networks of compassion, by people who had borne untold difficulties and survived famines and wars and revolutions, to salvage the likes of me.

I stood in my walker and stared at the nurses, orderlies, cleaning staff and patients.

I took another step. Then another. And another.”

The OHA asked me to wrap up my speech by opening the Innovations in Health Care Expo.

And, while I appreciate the honour, I know there’s a man in this room who would appreciate it even more...

...who has experienced, first hand, what true innovation and dedication can do.

So I’d like to invite Wayson Choy – the author of those beautiful words – up on stage to kick things off...

Wayson, thank you so much for being here...

And thank you, all, for taking the time to listen this morning.

We have done so much, but we have miles yet to go.

I look forward to continuing the journey with you.