

**MEDIA STATEMENT****Ontario Must Prepare Healthcare System for Second Surge of COVID-19 Patients**

**July 13, 2020, Toronto, ON** – “Today’s decision to move into Stage 3 of the province’s reopening plan is a judgement call made by Premier Doug Ford and his government, and responsibility for this decision rests with them. Both Ontarians and Ontario businesses have made extraordinary sacrifices over the past few months, which has made a powerful difference in curtailing the spread of COVID-19. Economic recovery is vital to bolstering our province in the time ahead – but equally important, as more public spaces open, is ensuring that our healthcare system is prepared for a possible second surge of COVID-19 patients.

Ontario hospitals have been the anchor of the COVID-19 response, delivering life-saving intensive care while additionally managing assessment units, lab testing, and deploying staff to assist in long-term care. However, a potential second wave of COVID-19 will likely collide with flu season, adding significant pressure to a sector already experiencing unprecedented demands and conditions.

Eighty per cent of the stand-by capacity created in hospitals at the onset of the pandemic has now been filled, and the number of patients waiting in hospitals for an alternate level of care (ALC), such as home care or long-term care, is well over 5,000 -- a figure that is unusually high for the summer months. With ongoing limitations on admission to long term care and the appropriate decision to eliminate use of three- and four-bed rooms to safeguard residents, the number of ALC patients in hospitals is likely to remain high. In combination with the need to restart and maintain elective activity, maintain acute care occupancy at 85 per cent to ensure standby capacity for a second wave and continue with ongoing COVID-19 related activities, Ontario’s hospitals will continue to be heavily tested in the months ahead.

A contingency plan is needed to ensure the healthcare system is equipped for a potential second surge, including the creation of regional health service and staffing plans that must be in place at the earliest opportunity. Within these plans, we recommend that the government support the widespread expansion of home care and community services, virtual care and paramedicine to ensure greater access to services outside the hospital setting. We also recommend the maintenance/construction of new (temporary) infrastructure, such as field hospitals, decommissioned hotels and empty residential buildings.

Given the scale of the reopening decision announced today, it is essential that the Government of Ontario monitor the status of COVID-19 extremely closely. Experience in the United States demonstrate that events can escalate out of control very quickly. By its very nature, moving to Stage 3 introduces heightened risk of renewed spread. As a result, it is essential that Ontario’s healthcare system be ready for further outbreaks and a second wave of the pandemic. Nothing should be taken for granted.”

- Anthony Dale, President and CEO, Ontario Hospital Association