

Today's News - Friday, April 28, 2017

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Date: Fri, 28 Apr 2017 13:33:38 -0400

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Minister of Finance Charles Sousa released the [2017 Ontario Budget: A Stronger, Healthier Ontario](#) yesterday afternoon. The Budget includes significant investments in education and health care and is Ontario's first balanced budget since the global recession. Premier Kathleen Wynne shared the following message on the 2017 Budget:

It's Budget day in Ontario, the first balanced Budget since the recession. What does it mean? We worked hard to eliminate the deficit because it lets government do more to address the very real concerns that people have. Yes, our economy is in a strong position and our businesses are creating more jobs than anywhere else in Canada. But the reality is that people are anxious about their jobs and their futures. They worry about the soaring cost of housing, the rise in part-time work and decline in benefits. So what you're seeing with today's balanced Budget is the foundation of our plan to address the challenges you are up against in this changing, uncertain economy.

One of those changes is the way businesses no longer provide health benefits plans for workers and their families, not like they used to. That's an extra cost for families, an added stress. So we're expanding health care to fill the gap. OHIP+ will give everyone 24 years old and under free access to prescription drugs. This is the biggest expansion of OHIP in a generation. We are also investing in major capital hospital projects around the province and giving a big boost to hospital operating budgets, which is going to mean lower wait times.

We're investing in education — right through the system, starting with more child care spaces. And we're making university and college tuition absolutely free for 210,000 students and making it so students don't graduate with as much debt. We are also focusing on those areas that will help make life more affordable through initiatives like our Fair Housing Plan and Fair Hydro Plan.

With this balanced budget we have the freedom and flexibility to respond to the new challenges people are facing in this new world. It's about making the right choices to support people now and setting our province on a course toward long-term success. There are some who look at this new world and say that government should just step back and stay out of it — but those are not my values. I believe there is a need for government to stand up and play an active role in building a fair society where there is more opportunity and more security for everyone.

We cannot be idle or complacent where it comes to our economy and to trade. We cannot

simply assume that the jobs of tomorrow will be available to Ontarians. This is the time for us to be focused, fair, and bold — to not simply describe and reassert our values, but to defend them and act on them. That's what we've done with this budget and what you will continue to see us doing over the days and months ahead.

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Also today:

As part of the 2017 Budget, Ontario is giving children and youth a better start in life by moving to make prescription medications free. Premier Kathleen Wynne was joined today by Dr. Eric Hoskins, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, and Charles Sousa, Minister of Finance, at Jenner Jean-Marie Community Centre in Toronto to announce the new OHIP+: Children and Youth Pharmacare Program. Beginning January 1, 2018, all children and youth 24 years of age and younger will be able to get their prescription medications for free by simply showing their Ontario health card number and a prescription. Coverage will be automatic with no upfront costs. The proposed new program will improve access to prescription medications for more than four million children and young people and will help many families to afford the medications their children need to stay healthy. Beyond the most common prescriptions, OHIP+ will give young people access to more than 4,400 drugs reimbursed under the [Ontario Drug Benefit Program](#), including medications listed under the Exceptional Access Program, at no cost. These include drugs to treat cancer and rare diseases. Ontario's drug funding program is already one of the country's most generous, helping to pay for needed prescription medications for seniors, people with high drug costs, and other vulnerable populations. Ontario is investing \$465M to expand coverage through OHIP+. Making prescription medications more affordable for families is part of our plan to create jobs, grow our economy and help people in their everyday lives.

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Our government's plan to build a stronger, healthier Ontario includes historic new investments in health care, including free medications for everyone 24 and under through OHIP+: Children and Youth Pharmacare, providing free tuition to over 210,000 students and on-the-job learning opportunities to help land a great job, helping 100,000 kids access quality, licensed child care and making it more affordable for families, making everyday life more affordable by reducing electricity costs by 25 per cent on average through our proposed Fair Hydro Plan, and taking action to make housing more affordable for homebuyers and renters through our Fair Housing Plan.