

Simcoe County Regional Q&As

April 6, 2017

Q. InnPower has applied to the Ontario Energy Board for an increase in distribution rates. Do you expect that will happen and will it mean an increase in electricity rates for Innisfil customers?

A. Recognizing that people in Ontario are struggling, we are lowering electricity bills by 25 per cent on average for families. Ontario is providing additional support to those facing the highest delivery costs in the province.

As part of our plan, legislation will soon be introduced regarding distribution charges levied by the eight utilities with the highest rates, which will all be lowered to protect ratepayers in these areas. InnPower is one of these utilities.

We expect InnPower to continue to try and find efficiencies and savings to protect consumers from rising costs. Nevertheless, we are moving forward with expanded rate protection that will limit distribution costs for InnPower customers.

It is important to be absolutely clear — regardless of the outcome of the OEB's rate hearing, the customers of InnPower would benefit from Ontario's Fair Hydro Plan. In fact, the majority would see their distribution charges decrease as a result of our programs.

This is all part of our government's plan to make the electricity system more fair in Ontario. By providing real, long-lasting relief our Fair Hydro Plan makes sense for Ontarians. Under our plan, electricity rates will come down, stay down and benefit families and businesses across the province.

Q. The Collingwood General & Marine Hospital saw a 35 per cent increase in its electricity costs last year alone. Will you extend some relief to hospitals on their electricity bills?

A. Our government committed to a strong, stable, publicly funded hospital system that delivers quality patient services efficiently.

Hydro costs are part of the daily hospital operations and hospitals are therefore expected to manage these costs through their global budget.

With the introduction of Ontario's Fair Hydro Plan, hospitals will benefit from shifting the funding for electricity support programs such as the Ontario Electricity Support Program (OESP) to provincial revenues.

Earlier this year, we expanded the Industrial Conservation Initiative (ICI) to all consumers with a peak demand above 1 MW. By lowering the threshold and removing sector restrictions, smaller hospitals will now be eligible to achieve up to one-third savings on their bill as of July 1, 2017.

Ontario's Save On Energy programs can also help hospitals reduce their energy consumption and manage their energy costs. Program offerings include financial incentives for energy efficient equipment, incentives for the construction of energy efficient buildings and funding and training for energy managers.

Hospitals may also participate in local conservation programs made available by their electricity distributor.

Q. The Fairview Wind Farm has been found by the Environmental Review Tribunal to pose a risk to human health and the environment — but the case is currently under appeal. What is your government's position on this case?

A. The process we have in place in these types of cases [Ontario's Renewable Energy Approval Process] ensures that the environment and human health are protected and that developers conduct extensive consultation.

As this matter is currently under appeal, it would be inappropriate for me to comment on it.

Q. Does the government have any plans to expand hospitals in Collingwood and Simcoe County?

A. The government is committed to a strong, stable, publicly funded hospital system that delivers quality patient services efficiently.

We have received a submission from Collingwood General and Marine Hospital for a redevelopment project, which is under review.

In 2016-17, the Ontario government invested an additional \$485 million into the hospital sector to provide better patient access to high-quality health care services, in keeping with our Patients First action plan for improving health care. This investment also supports hospitals in meeting ongoing pressures and continuing to provide services, particularly in hospitals experiencing high growth.

Hospital funding in Ontario has risen from \$11.3 billion in 2003-04 to \$17.5 billion in 2016-17 — a 55 percent increase. In 2016-17 the hospitals in the North Simcoe Muskoka Local Health Integration Network will have a projected funding increase of \$9.9 million.

Q. Recently, a worker at the Waypoint Centre for Mental Health Care was critically injured by an inmate. What is Ontario doing to address major safety concerns in our health care facilities?

A. I was saddened to hear of this incident. In Ontario violence and harassment in the workplace are not tolerated. They can cause immeasurable emotional costs for the workers and their families — and it is not acceptable.

Our government is enforcing occupational health and safety legislation and is working with its partners to make Ontario workplaces among the safest in the world.

In addition, Ontario has established a Workplace Violence Prevention in Health Care Leadership Table to better protect health care professionals on the job.

The Leadership Table is bringing key stakeholders together — including the Ontario Nurses' Association, Ontario Hospitals Association, other labour union representatives, Public Services Health and Safety Association and patient advocates — to advise on reducing and preventing workplace violence for health care professionals.

As this matter is currently before the court, it would be inappropriate to comment further.

Q. Grey County is debating health care changes including closure of a long-term care facility in Markdale. What is your government doing to ensure an adequate supply of such facilities in this region?

A. At this time the government has not received any communication from the operator of the long term care facility on this matter. We will review the proposal once it is submitted.

Ontario law requires that municipalities each maintain at least one long-term care home.

Q. What is your government doing to prevent schools in Simcoe Region from closing, like Barrie Central Collegiate did last year?

A. We understand that decisions to close schools are some of the most difficult decisions school boards will make, and these decisions impact the school community. This is why these decisions are best made at the local level by school boards with the involvement of the community. We need to support school boards as they make these tough decisions.

School consolidations ensure that students are accommodated in a school with a vibrant learning environment and enough students to offer a full range of programming and activities. More students and teachers at a consolidated school will enhance programming and extracurricular options for students.

Young people also need to be in safe and modern buildings, so projects to replace or upgrade key building components are also underway across Ontario.

That is why we are investing \$2.7 billion over two years to repair and renew thousands of Ontario schools. This is almost 70 per cent more than originally planned — because better buildings lead to better learning.