

Canadian Taxpayers Federation Misses the Mark on Hospital Hydro

A current media campaign underway from the Canadian Taxpayers Federation is cherry-picking from hospital hydro bills, while failing to see the bigger picture on both the healthcare and energy systems in Ontario.

We're talking about numbers here, so I'll share a significant one that we're proud of as a government. **Since coming into office, we've increased hospital funding by 59 per cent.** This trend continued in the 2017 Budget, which delivered a \$16.9 million funding increase for London Health Sciences. In fact, all hospitals in the province are seeing funding increases, including 16 hospitals in the Southwest. This is allowing our hospitals to treat more patients, improve access to care and reduce wait times to some of the shortest in the country.

Meanwhile, we've made investments in our electricity system that have left it significantly cleaner, having eliminated coal generation in our province. We have virtually eliminated smog days in Ontario, which is an enormous public health achievement. A Toronto Vital Signs report shows that premature deaths and hospitalizations as a result of air pollution have dropped by 23 per cent and 41 per cent respectively since 2004. The Taxpayers Federation ignores the fact that eliminating coal has saved billions in health care costs over the years and will continue to do so, for generations to come.

The reality is that hospitals spend an average of only 1.6 per cent of their total operating budgets on electricity bills. That means over 98 per cent of hospital budgets go towards their other priorities – hiring nurses and doctors, keeping wait times low, and ensuring patients have access to high-quality services, where and when they need them.

Ontario hospitals are also eligible for a range of programs, like saveONenergy's audit and retrofit initiatives, to help lower their energy bills by becoming more energy efficient. For example, Sudbury's Health Sciences North received more than \$275,000 in help for energy efficiency upgrades, which have resulted in over \$500,000 savings each year in energy costs.

On July 1, electricity rates for hospitals dropped by two to four per cent because of our Fair Hydro Plan. Rates for all residential customers dropped significantly – 25 per cent on average across the province. And any rate increases will be held to the rate of inflation for four years, while we continue to work hard to take costs out of our electricity system.

We are already hearing that these reductions are making a difference in the pocketbooks of families and businesses. For hospitals, the savings from the Fair Hydro Plan and programs like SaveOnEnergy are building on the health care investments we've made each and every year, and ensure our hospitals can stay focused on putting patients first.

Glenn Thibeault is Ontario's Minister of Energy and MPP for Sudbury