

VIEW FROM QUEEN'S PARK: Health Investment

By Chris Ballard, MPP
Newmarket-Aurora

Recently I was at Southlake Regional Health Centre to make an announcement regarding the province's ongoing support in health care by investing \$187 million in 2018-19 to make more beds available across the province.

This investment will enable selected hospitals, facing capacity challenges, to open beds where they are most needed now.

Residents of Newmarket-Aurora and across York Region know that hospital capacity is an important indicator of how our health care system, as a whole, is functioning. As our population ages; as our population grows, there is increased demand for the delivery of services across a wide range of care. Southlake serves an area of 1.8 million residents ? in York Region and South Simcoe. By 2021, this population will grow by more than 20 per cent. In fact, the area Southlake serves has the highest projected growth rate among LHINs.

Our government is taking action to help meet the immediate needs of patients during this year's flu season, and beyond. When in-patient beds are full, it means emergency department patients in need of critical care must wait before they can be admitted. Ontario is taking action to ensure our health care system is prepared to meet the needs of patients now, during flu season and beyond. We are investing in hospital beds to improve access to care for patients and reduce wait times in hospitals across the province. Hospital funding in Ontario has risen from \$11.3 billion in 2003-04 to \$18.1 billion in 2017-18 ? a 60 per cent increase. While no decisions have been made about any hospitals, through my work as MPP and my seat at Cabinet and at Treasury Board, I am strongly advocating for significant funding for Southlake.

I have high praise for the staff at Southlake. They have been creative in finding solutions; to adopt new technology; reorganize departments; change how care is delivered; and make do with minimum increases. There is only so much we can ask of this hospital and the great people who work there.

I'll be working hard at Queen's Park to make the surge beds permanent at Southlake. Southlake needs \$2 million in funding to plan for the future growth of this hospital and, frankly, it's time.

I have asked for funding to kick-start the establishment of a Mental Health Hub in this riding to serve the needs of youth and adults. I believe mental health is the single biggest health care and social issue we face in Newmarket-Aurora ? perhaps right across the province. As our Minister of Health is fond of saying, ?there is no health without mental health.?

I am proud to have begun those discussions with Southlake, York Regional Police and our LHIN to find a solution. Today, there are close to 20 organizations meeting to establish a mental health hub in this riding. A mental health hub will go a long way in addressing issues we face all across York Region.

Our government has, as a key priority, the need to ensure that patients and families receive the right care at the right time and in the right place. We continue to invest in home and community care services. We invested \$100 million to open more than 1,200 beds to increase capacity in hospitals in advance of the flu season. We created transitional care spaces outside of hospital for up to 1,700 patients who don't require care in a hospital. The province invested an additional \$100 million in 2017-18 in home care supports and services.

As part of our action plan for seniors, Ontario committed to create 5,000 long-term care beds over the next four years and more than 30,000 across the province over the next decade. I'm confident you'll see real action on this before the next election.

I will continue to work closely with Southlake, its staff and supporters; as well as others across my riding who provide both physical and mental health. I appreciate the work Southlake has done to clearly lay out a path forward

On a different note I would like to congratulate our two hometown heroes that are currently participating in the 2018 Pyeongchang Olympics. Derek Livingston of Aurora finished seventeenth overall in the men's snowboard halfpipe event. Newmarket's Gabrielle Daleman won a gold medal as part of the team event for Canada in figure skating and she will go for gold again in the women's individual event. You both have made your hometowns and your country beam with pride.

Did you know that Southlake Regional Hospital is built up around the former York County Hospital? The original YCH was the first hospital built in York Region and was located at Main Street and Millard Avenue. It had six beds and opened in 1922.

As always, I invite you to contact me on any issue. Please call my community office at 905-750-0019, or visit my website at www.ChrisBallardMPP.ca. My email is: cballard.mpp.co@liberal.ola.org. I look forward to hearing from you.