



December 14, 2017

For immediate release

GROUP CALLS FOR END TO GOVT FAVOURS FOR LEGAL LARGE LABORATORY CARTEL

(Toronto) A healthcare advocacy group is calling for the end of special privileges for the private oligopoly that controls 90% of community medical testing in Ontario.

At a media conference at Queen's Park this morning, Ontario Coalition for Lab Reform (OCLR) Spokesperson, Gerard Kennedy, also CEO of Alpha Healthcare, said "The needs of community patients have been sacrificed for unaccountable big private interests for far too long."

According to last week's Auditor General's report and a new report released by OCLR today, it is the legal laboratory cartel, and not the government, that is controlling the conditions for medical testing of community patients across the province.

The OCLR report indicates over 1 million Ontarians are experiencing significant difficulty in getting lab tests done in the community, at much higher levels than elsewhere in Canada and in comparison countries. The leading challenge is for frail elderly and mobility-challenged individuals who are forced to bring themselves down to public service centres with the help of friends, family and social agencies to be tested because home lab visits have been made so scarce and expensive by cutbacks not by government but by private laboratories. Other problems are unnecessarily repeated tests, costs and tests not ready at the time of appointment.

Kennedy is also calling on the Minister of Health to immediately make his plans for 'modernization of laboratories' fully public so healthcare professionals and patients in particular can comment before it is final. Portions of the previously secret plan were brought out in last week's Auditor's report. "It looks like the new approach could be just as tilted in favour of the biggest corporate labs as the old one," says Kennedy, "which is completely different from what the Minister has said publicly as recently as last month."

The report also shows how larger laboratories reduced many laboratory services over time and may have been overpaid by as much as \$1 billion.

OCLR has launched a public campaign, "Make Lab Tests Matter!" - *It's what you don't know that can hurt you* to encourage the Ministry to take laboratory discussions out of the back rooms to where the 7.5 million Ontarians who need the service each year can be part of it. The changes are the first to be made in 20 years/2

“ The government needs to take firm charge of community medical lab services,” said Cheryl Kerr, CEO of MedEx , a diversified health services firm that includes long term care facility laboratory services. “ I know people and nursing homes that could benefit from better laboratory services from small business and non-profits, but it is all controlled in a way that is not healthy.”

“There are so many really good tests that could benefit Ontario patients,” said Idelta Coelho, VP at Alpha Laboratories, who spoke about tests such as calprotectin and the urea breath test that have been available in other provinces for years. Ontario has not approved any new tests for its residents for the past 17 years.

“I do blood work at home for my elderly patients and another 200 boarding home residents, but it's like practicing medicine in a developing country. There are still so many gaps,” said Dr. William Etkorn, a community family physician in Toronto. “People don't have disposable income to cover the service fees. Home lab tests mean more patients avoid emergency rooms because we prevent more illness.”

-30-

For more information, or for a copy of the new *Critical Values Report* on Ontario’s Community Medical Laboratory Services, please contact:

Christine Pierroz at (416) 948-2166 (cell)

ONTARIO COALITION FOR LAB REFORM

The Ontario Coalition for Lab Reform is a group of longstanding same-owner operated medical laboratories, non-profit laboratory organizations, laboratory professionals, healthcare providers, and allied health services trying to improve the benefit to patients outcomes, value to the healthcare system, and confidence among the public of Ontario’s medical laboratory system.

www.labreform.ca

info@labreform.ca

@ONlabreform.ca