

# Unchecked, a Grim Future Looms for Post-Secondary Education and Healthcare

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It is imperative that educators be as assertive and transparent as possible in educating our students as to the attacks we see on our post-secondary and public healthcare sectors. These attacks, in the form of government priorities and actions, diminish our quality of life and erode confidence in the value of public services.

Ontario colleges, for instance, are increasingly becoming virtual institutions, offering programs and courses only online. A 'reserve army of labour' keeps this machine going, as the number of precarious contract faculty regularly outnumber full-time faculty [three to one](#). At the

time of the first Ontario college faculty strike in 1984, the ratio of full-time to contract faculty was four to one. This reversal not only cheapens the costs of highly educated workers, with the resultant stress and [insecurity](#) of income and tenure that accompanies it, but impacts the quality of learning for students as well. How has this situation developed?

In short, post-secondary is being bled dry. On a per capita basis, Ontario has the [lowest](#) post-secondary education spending of all the provinces and territories. Post-secondary administrators, once predominantly drawn from the academic community, are increasingly brought in from the business sector, which has resulted in commercialization and contracting-out, in addition to the misuse and gross exploitation of [International students](#).

New [corporate sector](#) funding initiatives increasingly undermine academic integrity, remaking students into consumers of education, laying the basis for further privatization initiatives. As a result, instead of being accountable to senates and the wider community, universities and colleges are increasingly run like a business, with an oversized role for boards of governors which increasingly [influence](#) academic decisions – the rightful and historic home of elected senators.

Like post-secondary education, public healthcare is also under attack. In increasing numbers, Ontario nurses are [leaving](#) the profession. Why? Burnout as a result of their working conditions that reveal increased stress due to government and employer demands to do more with less. More patients to care for. More aged residents of nursing homes. More for-profit pressures in homes for the aged reflected, for example, in homes that are either [too cold or too hot](#). In these [places](#), employers and managers care more about increasing the company's profits than they do about safe and secure working conditions for staff, let alone the dignity of their residents.



Likewise, there is now a dangerous shortage of family doctors, with over 2.5 million Ontarians without a family doctor – a million more than when Doug Ford's Conservatives were first elected in 2018. What are the implications for the family doctors we do have in the public health care system? More stress and loss of quality care because there are fewer doctors dealing with many ill and stressed out patients requiring their care.

What about the huge growth in private health care, especially those involving specialized branches? There is no accounting for the crisis in healthcare without tying it to constant pressures for privatization, even if it ends

of [costing taxpayers](#) more, both in their quality of care and tax dollars. Lower income households, most without private health care insurance coverage, are thus at the mercy of profit-minded providers. As Doug Ford is fond of boasting, 'Open for Business' indeed.



As educators, we have a moral responsibility to do what is right for our students. As workers, we have an obligation to do what is right in support of other workers and members of the wider public. But we need to do more. And there is no better place than starting in our own unions. Strong, solidaristic collective agreements not only impact our quality of our work, but the quality of student learning and outcomes.

And like the wider degradation of post-secondary education and healthcare, these issues are inextricably linked to public policies. Like healthcare workers, educators are not here to produce robots for an insensitive and profit-minded employer. We are here to develop knowledge, understanding and skills to be thinking and engaged citizens, now and into the future. As Max Weber wrote more than a century ago, the teacher's primary task is to impart knowledge and teach students to recognize "inconvenient" facts. The fact of

the matter is this: left unchecked, the crisis in post-secondary education and healthcare will only continue to get worse, with long-term and generational implications. □

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Perspectives are concise opinion pieces meant to spark public dialogue and encourage new ways of thinking on a range of work and labour related issues. These articles are meant to inform and promote worker perspectives in a manner that challenges the current state of knowledge in a particular field.

#### About the Centre

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