

# NEWS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

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## **Liberals Squander Taxpayer's Hard Earned Dollars**

eHealth is suddenly becoming a household name in political circles across Ontario. eHealth Ontario was set up by the Liberal government in the fall of 2008 to finally bring Ontario's medical records into the electronic age. It would allow physicians of all disciplines to share medical files and cut down delays and transfer errors for patients.

So why have both Opposition Parties spent the last week of Question Period demanding answers about uncontrolled spending at eHealth? Because almost \$839 million of your hard earned tax dollars are being spent on something that still doesn't exist.

It almost doesn't sound possible, but the McGuinty Liberals have found a way to do it.

Back in 2003, the Smart Systems for Health Agency was set up to create electronic health records for Ontarians, but was dissolved last fall after a review of the agency highlighted poor investments and lack of direction.

Shortly after, eHealth Ontario was created. But, as Ontarians foot the bill; electronic health records still do not exist.

Since the government began working on electronic health record initiatives, millions of taxpayer dollars have gone to lining the pockets of consultants instead of implementing electronic health records for Ontario.

Taxpayers have been footing the bill for transportation costs, luxury apartments, food bills, and a \$2,750 per day contract fee for executive Allaudin Merali. This executive lives in Edmonton and bills Ontarians for his regular trips to Ontario; 33 times in five months to be exact. Another consultant was paid \$300 an hour to read newspapers, watch television, and have conversations on the subway! None of these contracts were tendered, which is necessary under current government rules. Rules that were set up specifically to protect taxpayer's money and ensure that favoritism is not practiced.

The McGuinty government has been very quick to hand out untendered contracts for this slow moving project. Before starting at eHealth, Mr. Merali was investigated by the Alberta Auditor General for creative accounting practices; creating artificial transactions to paint a false picture about the finances. Two months after he left Alberta, he wound up at eHealth Ontario, his salary effectively doubling under a secret contract not put out to tender.

*Sylvia Jones MPP, Working for You*

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This is why the Progressive Conservative party has demanded that Premier McGuinty and his Minister of Health demonstrate accountability to the taxpayers of Ontario and call in the Auditor General to conduct a value-for-money audit of eHealth Ontario immediately.

Just this past weekend Sarah Kramer, the CEO of eHealth Ontario, was effectively fired by the Board of Directors. Not only did she make \$2,700 per day with eHealth Ontario, but even with that very generous salary, felt it necessary to expense items like tea, dessert squares and \$4.00 taxi rides to the taxpayers. At a time when hundreds of thousands of Ontarians are struggling to find and keep their jobs, this out of touch reality is galling and disrespectful.

We now learn that upon leaving eHealth Ontario, Kramer has been given \$317,000 in severance. Add this to the \$114,000 bonus she already collected five months into her job at eHealth, and her \$2,700 per day salary, she has taken home a large paycheque courtesy of the Ontario taxpayer.

The taxpayers of Ontario deserve accountability from their government. As many families struggle to get by during troubling economic times, the McGuinty government has chosen to close their eyes and ignore the real problems of their out of control spending.

For Opposition Parties to use almost all of their time during Question Period, and focus an entire week on one issue is without precedence since I was elected in 2007. The Premier and his Minister of Health have overlooked the problems at eHealth for too long. Nothing short of Minister of Health's resignation is acceptable. I would expect to see a cabinet shuffle in the coming months to remove this ineffective Minister from the hot seat, but I believe his lack of action calls for stronger repercussions.

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*Sylvia Jones MPP, Working for You*