

# MPP calls for Ontario to pay for cancer tests

Late diagnosis can cost \$66,000 more than if disease is detected early

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As "November" draws to a close, the MPP with arguably the best moustache at Queen's Park wants to do more than just raise awareness of prostate cancer:

NDP MPP Wayne Gates (Niagara Falls) would like the Ontario Health Insurance Plan to cover the cost of all prostate-specific antigen (PSA) tests.

The screening, which costs around \$35, should be available to all men who need it, Gates said Tuesday.

To that end, the MPP has brought a motion to the floor of the legislature to urge the Progressive Conservative government to fund the test.

"Early detection of prostate cancer saves lives," he told re-

porters, noting when detected early the survival rate is nearly 100 per cent.

Ontario and British Columbia are the only provinces that do not cover the cost of the PSA test for all men whose physicians request it.

"By providing this blood test free of charge under OHIP, lives will be saved in Ontario," said Gates, adding about 9,600 men in the province will be diagnosed with prostate cancer this year and 1,500 will die from the disease.

Todd Minerson, the country director for Movember Canada, the charity that encourages men to grow moustaches in November to raise funds and awareness, praised Gates's initiative.

"An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure," Minerson said.

Indeed, given that a late diagnosis of prostate cancer can cost the health system \$66,000



JULIE JOCSAK TORSTAR FILE PHOTO

Niagara Falls NDP MPP Wayne Gates said about 9,600 men in the province will be diagnosed with prostate cancer this year and 1,500 will die from the disease.

more than if the disease was detected earlier, there could be savings of \$60 million annually.

Stuart Edmonds, vice-president of Prostate Cancer Canada, said more testing would lead to "better outcomes for everyone."

Edmonds pointed out that OHIP already covers the cost of screening tests for breast cancer, colorectal cancer and cervical cancer.

A spokesperson for Health Minister Christine Elliott em-

phasized that the government takes prostate cancer seriously. "When prostate cancer is suspected because of family history or the results of a checkup, the prostate-specific antigen test is made available at no charge to the patient," said Hayley Chazan.

"Most international and national screening guidelines recommend against population-based or general screening purposes for prostate cancer because there is no conclusive evi-

dence that prostate cancer screening reduces illness or death associated with prostate cancer," Chazan said.

"Aligned with these guidelines, PSA testing is not paid for by the provincial health plan for men without symptoms," she said.

"Our government will continue to work with partners, including Cancer Care Ontario, to make evidence-based decisions in order to strengthen cancer screening services."