

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September brings focus to childhood cancer across Ontario

(Toronto, August 25, 2011) – For many children, September is the month they will go back to school. And on that first day back, while they excitedly catch up with friends and learn the routine of a new teacher and classroom, other kids will be in hospital focused on a very different first—starting a round of chemotherapy. September is Childhood Cancer Awareness Month and Pediatric Oncology Group of Ontario (POGO) and its partners across the province are drawing attention to the fact that children get cancer and their journey, sometimes starting even before the child’s first birthday, is unique.

The impact of a childhood cancer diagnosis on a family’s life is far reaching. School and other everyday activities are put on hold while the child is in treatment. One or both parents must leave their job to care for the ill child which results in income loss – up to 1/3 of after-tax income according to POGO. Care for siblings also must be considered, especially if the family must travel away from home for cancer treatment. One year or more later, depending on the type of cancer and its treatment, when the child is cancer-free, there is even more to consider. While the survival rate now tops a remarkable 80%, approximately 60% of survivors face late effects caused by their cancer and/or its treatment, including learning challenges that impact the survivor’s ability to successfully transfer into college, university or the workplace.

Since 1983, POGO has taken a wholistic approach to supporting children and families. The charitable organization has worked in collaboration with doctors, nurses, psychologists, social workers and other health care providers at five main treatment hospitals - in Hamilton, Kingston, Toronto, London, Ottawa - as well as with Ontario’s Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to provide services and programs that span the spectrum of care. At diagnosis, children enter a coordinated, equitable, state-of-the art system. Soon after, POGO Community Interlink Nurses help families understand aspects of their child’s care, access community services and financial assistance through POGO and other sources, and liaise with the child’s school. As treatment progresses, POGO’s provincial satellite oncology program allows some of the child’s care to be delivered closer to their homes at seven local hospitals across Ontario. Then, when the child is cancer-free, POGO’s counselling program (SAVTI) helps students prepare for post-secondary education or employment, and AfterCare Clinics monitor and promote their health, reducing the impact of late effects by identifying risks and modifying treatment as necessary.

Led by POGO, Childhood Cancer Awareness Month is a collaborative effort of the province’s childhood cancer hospitals and community-based cancer care organizations to celebrate achievements in pediatric oncology and POGO’s enduring collaboration with the pediatric cancer community.

“Childhood cancer is the leading disease-related cause of death among children in Ontario,” says Dr. Corin Greenberg, POGO’s Executive Director. “So, we are extremely grateful for the efforts of so many Ontario communities who will present local events to raise awareness of this critical issue.”

POGO's annual grassroots chalk-drawing campaign, sponsored by Crayola, will see some 20,000 pieces of chalk distributed to communities and schools where pictures and messages of encouragement and hope will be drawn for childhood cancer patients and survivors.

This year, the hallmark of Childhood Cancer Awareness Month activities takes place September 16 in Toronto with the National Day of Action and Awareness for Kids with Cancer. Presented by Coast to Coast Against Cancer and partners like POGO, the event culminates at dusk with the lighting of the CN Tower in gold, the symbolic colour of childhood cancer. POGO also anticipates mayors across the province will proclaim one day, likely September 16, as childhood cancer awareness day.

Sporting and educational events, gold ribbon distribution campaigns and more are planned in communities across Ontario. To find out what's happening near you, visit www.pogo.ca.

Look for POGO public service announcements on television, radio and in newspapers and other media across select markets in Ontario.

Communities wishing to commemorate Childhood Cancer Awareness Month can obtain a POGO toolkit by contacting Christine Cleland toll-free at 1-855-FOR POGO (367-7646) ext. 253 or ccleland@pogo.ca. Locally, call 416.592.1232.

POGO gratefully acknowledges the support of the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care.

Pediatric Oncology Group of Ontario (POGO) is a charitable organization collaborating for children with cancer and their families since 1983. As the official advisor to Ontario's Ministry of Health and Long-Term care on childhood cancer care and control, POGO works in the areas of healthcare innovation, survivor care, education, family assistance, population data, policy development and research. POGO partners with a multidisciplinary group including oncologists, pediatric nurses, social and behavioural professionals, and survivors and parents to ensure that children with cancer are given equal access to state-of-the-art cancer care to ensure timely and accurate diagnosis, treatment, follow-up care for survivors and end of life care.

-30-

FACTS ABOUT CHILDHOOD CANCER

- Every year in Ontario, over 400 children are diagnosed with cancer* and by the age of 20, 1 in 330 individuals will be diagnosed with a malignant disease.
- The types of cancer affecting children are very different from those commonly occurring in adults. Acute leukemias and primary brain tumours account for almost half of all cancers in childhood.

- In contrast to many of the cancers affecting adults, the causes of cancer in childhood are largely unknown, so programs for prevention are not a current priority.
- Adolescents and young adults with cancer have specific medical, behavioural, palliative and survivorship needs. However, they all too often fall between the conventional health care delivery systems. Collaboration between the pediatric and adult oncology systems is required.
- Cancer is the leading disease-related cause of death among kids in Ontario, after the first year of life. However more than 80% of children survive cancer in this province.
- At any point in time, approximately 4,000 of Ontario's children require cancer care.*
- POGO studies show that treatment related out-of-pocket costs add up to approximately 1/3 of after-tax income annually for Ontario families.
- Since 2010, it is estimated that between 1 in 250 to 1 in 400 young adults (aged 15-45) is a childhood cancer survivor. (Ries, 2002 SEER Cancer Statistics Review 1973 -1999, Bethesda MD National Cancer Institute).
- Approximately 2/3 of survivors of childhood cancer face late effects of their disease and treatment, including neurocognitive impairments, sterility and secondary cancers.**

*Data source: the POGO Networked Information System (POGONIS)

**Oeffinger KC, Mertens AC, Sklar CA, Kawashima T, Hudson MM, Meadows AT, Friedman DL, Marina N, Hobbie W, Kadan-Lottick NS, Schwartz CL, Leisenring W, Robison LL; Childhood Cancer Survivor Study. Chronic health conditions in adult survivors of childhood cancer. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 2006;355(15):1572-82.

Media contacts:

Kelly Zorzi, 416.592.1232 ext. 252 or kzorzi@pogo.ca
Jacqui DeBique, 416.592.1232 ext. 266 or jdebique@pogo.ca
Toll-free: 1-855-FOR POGO (367-7646)