

# Protect Public Health Care for all Canadians:

## Stop Private Clinics and Unlawful User-fees and Extra-billing of Patients

The Ontario Health Coalition, in partnership with the provincial and territorial health coalitions and the Canadian Health Coalition, has been working tirelessly to bring an end to the unlawful extra-billing of patients by private health clinics and stop the privatization of health care services. Private clinics undermine public health care and equal, universal health care for all Canadians by billing public health plans (like OHIP) and also billing patients extra user fees, sometimes amounting to thousands of dollars for medically needed care. This is unlawful under the Canada Health Act and it causes hardship and growing inequity.

We have written an Open Letter to all Provincial and Federal Health Ministers in Canada calling upon them to uphold the Canada Health Act, stop two-tier user fees and extra-billing of patients, and stop privatization. Our goal is to get 1,000 organizations to sign on to the open letter. You can sign-on online through the link here (in French and English):

<http://www.ontariohealthcoalition.ca/index.php/open-letter/>

### Who Should Sign On?

Please share this letter with all your contacts and ask them to sign on their organizations also.

- Organizations only please
- Suggestions: seniors groups, student association unions, patient advocacy groups, ethno-cultural organizations, women's groups, poverty/equity seeking organizations, social service agencies, community health centres, nurse's groups, health professional groups, doctor's groups, social service organizations, non-profit organizations, equity-seeking groups, municipalities, hospitals, disease/health condition/disability/ability advocacy and service groups, and any other organizations that support public health care for all.

### Background:

Canada's public health care system is based on the moral principle that care is provided based on people's medical needs not their wealth. Health care is to be equitably provided to all Canadians.

But across Canada, local public hospitals have seen services cut and contracted

out to private clinics. These private clinics sell diagnostic tests and surgeries as profit-seeking businesses. They make profits from our public health care plans (such as OHIP) and by charging patients extra user-fees for access to health care. In our studies, we have called all the private clinics across Canada and found repeatedly that the vast majority are violating the Canada Health Act which protects patients by banning these extra user-fees. A number of the clinics have been found to be double-billing (billing the patient and the public health plan for the same procedure or test). When public campaigns have been mounted by public interest groups such as Ontario Health coalition, we have successfully pushed back extra billing but we need more action from government to protect patients.

It should not be permissible for Canadian patients to be forced to pay thousands of dollars out of pocket for medically necessary cataracts surgery that should be covered under their health care plan. In British Columbia, these private clinics have taken the government to court in an attempt to bring down the laws that protect patients against extra-billing.

Private clinics are proven to cost more -- often double or even five times the cost -- than public hospitals. For example: private clinics are routinely charging \$1,000 for a basic MRI. The average cost of an MRI in Ontario or B.C. in a public hospital paid by our government health plan is about \$350. Private clinics routinely charge \$2,000 plus hundreds for extra eye tests etc. to elderly patients seeking cataract surgery. In Ontario, for example, it costs \$560 for cataract surgery in a public hospital, paid by our public health insurance plan. In a number of cases, the private clinics are charging the patient and charging the government-funded public health plan also!

We ask that you take the time to read and share this information, and help to safeguard public health care from for-profit privatization. Please sign onto the Open Letter to Canada's Health Ministers.

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*~ Protecting Public Medicare for All ~*

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