

Deep Integration and Health Care

Public health care is under attack in Canada. Business groups, right-wing think tanks and some politicians want to replace Canada's comprehensive, universal public system with a U.S.-style two-tier system. Our provincial governments are in no rush to stop them. And the federal government is hastening privatization by harmonizing our environmental, food and health-related policies with those of the U.S. Unless Canadians rise up to defend it, our public health care system will not survive this double onslaught from the for-profit sector and deep integration.

Canada is already privatizing

About one third of all Canadian public health spending goes to for-profit care, as services are de-listed and doctors opt out of medicare. Private clinics are multiplying, particularly in British Columbia and Quebec, while Canada Health Act violations, like service charges and annual fees at clinics, go unpunished. Since the 2005 Supreme Court decision in the Chaoulli case, provinces are now also considering allowing private insurance to compete with Canada's universal health insurance plan. This will allow people to pay for faster service – if they can afford it.

Why is this happening?

Health care in Canada is still suffering from massive federal cuts to provincial transfers in the mid-1990s, which resulted in increased wait times and a shortage of doctors and nurses across Canada.

Provincial governments, starved of federal funding, are turning to the private sector for solutions, even if all the evidence proves that this will be more expensive, drain the public system of resources, and lead to longer wait times.

Profit's point of no return

The exemption for health care within the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which has largely kept the big U.S. for-profit health corporations out of Canada, applies only to a fully publicly funded system. Once privatized, the system must treat U.S. companies as if they were Canadian. This would make U.S. private hospital chains, HMOs and private insurance companies eligible for government funding, draining resources from the public system. Meanwhile, doctors will flee the public system looking for more money in the private sector.

Save public health care

Canada can and must find public solutions to wait times, hire more doctors and nurses, and strengthen our public health insurance system so that all

Canadians get timely, equal access to health care. Public solutions are possible at a cost we can afford, not at one that would bring U.S.-style private health care to Canada.

To find out more information and to join the Profit is not the Cure campaign, visit www.profitisnotthecure.ca.

