

This federal election, vote to STOP PRIVATE HEALTH CARE



Canada's health care system is under threat. Private investors, many based in the United States, are clamouring to cash in on Canadian health care in the wake of a Supreme Court decision that opens the door in Quebec to the purchase of private health insurance for publicly insured services when waits prove unacceptable.

Profit is not the cure

But the answer to wait times is not to let some people pay their way to the front of the line. Private health care is more expensive, drains resources from the public system, limits access to those who can afford to pay, and puts patients at risk by cutting corners in favour of corporate profits. The U.S. spends more per capita on health care than Canada, yet 45.8 million American citizens have no health insurance coverage. And those who do have coverage either pay huge amounts out of pocket or the companies they work for shoulder the burden. Study after study shows that public health care costs less and delivers better, more timely care.

Despite the facts, big business organizations, led by the Canadian Council of Chief Executives (CCCE), have been pushing for privatization of health care services in Canada. These same organizations are also promoting stronger economic ties with the United States. In their view, health care is one area where these "ties" could be forged.

Deeper integration with the United States would put tremendous pressure on Canada to harmonize its health care system with the American model and open it up to competition from American corporations.

NAFTA and health care

Free trade and public health care don't mix. Opening the doors of our health care system to for-profit companies will mean opening the floodgates. Once Canadian private interests have a stake, so do American private interests. NAFTA is clear – the exemption for health care, which has largely kept the big U.S. health corporations out of Canada, applies only to a fully publicly funded system. If public health care systems become privatized, Canada must give "national treatment" rights to U.S.-based companies that compete for health services. Not only would U.S. health corporations have the right to set up shop in Canada,

they would also have the same right to public funding as Canadian companies.

Health care's woes

The 1995 federal budget cut cash transfers to the provinces by a staggering 40 per cent, gutting the health care system. In 2004, the government finally committed \$40 billion to health care with the Health Accord. But it didn't tie any of this money to concrete results, like shorter waiting lists. And the government hasn't done its job to monitor or enforce the Canada Health Act and stop the provinces from spending transfer payments on private health care.

Not only that, but the skyrocketing cost of pharmaceuticals is the biggest single cost driver in our health care system today, yet the federal government has done nothing to help control these costs.

Meanwhile, provinces are using the public-private partnership model for hospitals. Private, for-profit corporations build and own hospitals and run all of their "non-clinical" services. They lease the hospital back to the public under a hefty, multi-decade lease. This model supposedly allows the government to maintain control of hospital programs and services, while companies run them. The reality is that private companies must find ways to make profits for their investors. This usually results in cost cutting that, inevitably, hurts patients.

The cure

To protect public health care, the federal government must:

- Enforce the Canada Health Act
- Stop funding private, for-profit health care
- Establish minimum standards for universal access to all necessary services

Profit is not the cure. It's time to stand up for public health care – before it's too late.

This federal election, demand that candidates stop health care privatization in Canada.

Visit www.canadians.org to download the Council of Canadians' Voter's Guide, and see where the parties stand on health care. Or call 1-800-387-7177 for more information.