

Open letter to Stephen Harper and Paul Martin on wait time 'guarantees'

January 18, 2006

Dear Mr. Harper and Mr. Martin:

We are deeply concerned that your focus in this election on wait time 'guarantees' as the solution to problems in Canada's public health care system is, in fact, a guarantee that our public health care system will be further eroded.

You are setting up the public health care system for failure by promising Canadians reduced wait times, without promising to solve, within the public system, the ongoing issues that create wait times. Unsustainable wait time targets that can only be reached by compromising other aspects of the public system are a Trojan Horse for private, for-profit health care delivery.

The claim that for-profit clinics will help reduce wait times in the public system is simply false. Health care practitioners cannot be in more than one place at the same time. Creating a parallel private, for-profit system will take much-needed doctors, nurses, radiologists and other health care workers out of our public system. Given that we already have a shortage of health care workers, allowing for-profit health care to grow will only increase wait times in the public system.

What we need is planning, investment and innovation within the public system.

The public system has already begun to respond to the issue of wait times. In facilities as diverse as the Queensway Clinic in Toronto, the Pan-Am Clinic in Winnipeg and the Capital Health Authority in Edmonton, wait times have been substantially reduced. These and other examples demonstrate that effective solutions to wait times can be found within the public system.

You have promised wait time guarantees. Will you guarantee publicly-funded, publicly-delivered health care for all Canadians? That is the only guarantee that matters.

Sincerely,
Canadian Health Coalition
Canadian Labour Congress
The Council of Canadians
Canadian Union of Public Employees
National Anti-Poverty Organization
Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada

For more information on wait times contact:

Mike McBane, National Coordinator, Canadian Health Coalition
(613) 277-6295 mmcbane@sympatico.ca