

Ontario Health Coalition

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June 21, 2011

For Immediate Release

Attn: Assignment Editor

Coalition Applauds McGuinty Government for Taking Steps to Safeguard Single-Tier Medicare

**All Ontario Political Parties Should Make Clear Commitment Against For-Profit Privatization of Health Care
Before October 6 Provincial Election**

Toronto – The Ontario Health Coalition applauds the McGuinty government for making a clear commitment to pursue legal action against private for-profit clinics and physicians that charge patients unlawful fees for health care.

The coalition urges media to publicize the toll free phone line and email complaint line for patients to use if they have a complaint or question about a fee that they have been charged for health care services.

The toll-free number is 1-888-662-6613 and the email address is: protectpublichealthcare@ontario.ca

The coalition is using the opportunity afforded by this announcement to press all political parties in Ontario to make a clear commitment to stop the expansion of private for-profit clinics and health care services.

“We applaud the McGuinty government for making a clear commitment to pursue legal action to uphold protections for patients against illegal user fees and extra-billing,” said Natalie Mehra, Director of the Ontario Health Coalition.

“The evidence is very clear that private for-profit clinics maximize their profits by charging the tax-payer funded health system and charging patients fees on top – even when these fees are illegal,” she added. “This is one of the reasons that private health clinics and institutions are such a threat to an equal and fair health system. These user fees are a fundamental violation of the principles of our public health care system which is supposed to provide care based on need, not on wealth or ability to pay.”

“Equally important, Ontarians need to know now where each political party stands on private for-profit clinics and health care services before the provincial election on October 6,” she said. “We are asking each of the provincial political party leaders to make a clear commitment to roll back the expansion of for-profit clinics and institutions, the majority of which charge patients illegal fees and undermine public medicare in Canada, and instead improve health care in Ontario through our public and non-profit institutions and services.”

“We are pleased with the leadership being shown by Ontario’s government in safeguarding universal single-tier Medicare,” added Mike McBane National Coordinator of the Canadian Health Coalition. “In provinces with the most private for-profit clinics, including British Columbia, Alberta and Quebec, we are seeing unlawful fees charged to patients that amount to hundreds or even thousands of dollars. We urge other provinces to take the same steps as Ontario: make it easy for patients to levy complaints; investigate these complaints promptly; and take legal action against the private clinics and physicians that break Canada’s medicare laws.”

The OHC conducted a major research project in which we found that the majority of the private for-profit clinics in Canada are charging patients user fees, even in violation of Canada’s medicare laws. The results are contained in a report “Eroding Public Medicare: Lessons and Consequences of For-Profit Health Care Across Canada” at <http://www.web.net/~ohc/Eroding%20Public%20Medicare.pdf>

For more information: Ontario Health Coalition 416-441-2502.