



Attn: Assignment Editor
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For Immediate Release

Chamber of Commerce Privatization Report Poorly Researched, Not in Public Interest: Health Coalition

Toronto – The Ontario’s Chamber of Commerce waded into health care reform today with a poorly-researched and argued report that would cause Ontarians harm if implemented, noted the Ontario Health Coalition. The OCC report is not grounded in evidence. It is comprised of a hodgepodge of anecdotes that are often inaccurate and contradictory. The OCC’s stated goal in their report is to expand privatization. Aside from the poor quality of the research and manipulative use of data in the report, the report’s authors provide no evidence to support privatization as a solution for any problems that they identify.

The Chamber report repeatedly overstates expenditure data. For the record, health spending has been declining as a share of Ontario’s budget for years. According to Ontario Ministry of Finance 2016 Ontario Budget health spending is now at 38.7% -- a far cry from the 50% figure repeatedly misreported in the Chamber’s report.

For years Ontarians and Canadians have been subjected to this rhetoric of crisis and unsustainability by private interests who are trying to win health reform so that they can take profit from the health care system. These tactics have never worked. Repeated polls show that Canadians strongly believe in the core values of equitable access to care based on need, not wealth.

The fact is that for-profit privatization is incompatible with the core principle shared by the vast majority of Canadians that equal access to health care should be based on need not wealth. Canadians will not be able to safeguard any portion of a universal single-tier public health system if we allow for-profit privatization of medically needed hospital and physician services. Already, patients experience the hardship of for-profit health care in home and long-term care.

In fact, the evidence is irrefutable that for-profit privatization results in increased user fees for patients, greater inequality in access, hardship for patients, and higher costs for public insurers. The Ontario Health Coalition has conducted repeated studies in which we have directly called every private clinic in our province and every private clinic across the country. We found that the majority of private clinics charge OHIP and charge patients on top in extra user fees -- for the same service. Their fees far exceed costs under the public health care system. In private cataract surgery clinics, for example, clinics not only bill OHIP approx. \$500 per cataract surgery (2014 Ministry of Health data) but they also bill patients hundreds of dollars extra for administrative fees and add-ons such as medically unnecessary tests. Many clinics violate the Canada Health Act and charge patients \$1,200 to \$3,000 for the cataract surgery – even though the patient has already paid in their taxes and should receive the surgery without charge under OHIP and the Canada Health Act. In private MRI clinics, patients are regularly charged \$1,000 or more for an MRI which costs on average approximately \$250 under OHIP (2011 Ministry of Health data). In addition, the private clinics locate in large urban centres, and take scarce staff out of local public hospitals reducing care levels. While they take



resources out of public hospitals, they only take the lightest most “profitable” patients, while leaving behind the heaviest care patients with fewer resources to care for them.

While it may be the case that for-profit clinics have lobbied the Chamber to take this position, the fact is that expanded privatization is not in the public interest. Moreover, it is not in the interest of most businesses in Ontario that would have to pay the higher costs of private clinics, public-private partnership and medically-unnecessary add-ons that would result from expanded health care privatization.

It should be noted that private clinics locate in large urban centres where there is a sizeable market of wealthy people who can pay their extra user fees. This causes further loss of local health services for rural and smaller communities. To pretend that privatization is a solution for cuts to local public hospitals that have devastated mid-sized, smaller and rural towns is pretense indeed. Privatization would only make their situations worse.

The Ontario Health Coalition has provided a full analysis of the Chamber report on its website at www.ontariohealthcoalition.ca

Quotes:

“We are disappointed that the Chamber came out with this report which is neither in the interests of Ontarians nor in the interests of many of the Chamber’s members,” noted Natalie Mehra, executive director. “Privatization is not an add-on to public health care, it is a take-away. It drives up costs, deprives our local towns of needed services and results in user fees of hundreds or even thousands of dollars for patients when they are sick, elderly and least able to pay.”

“There are so many improvements that the Chamber of Commerce can and should advocate, rather than privatization. Ontarians – and Ontario businesses – need an expansion of public health care to cover prescription drugs, thereby reducing the cost and expanding coverage to all Canadians,” said Ross Sutherland, MA, RN, chair of the Ontario Health Coalition. “We need improved planning, better management of overused prescription drugs and medical technologies, and integration of home care into a public non-profit system that gets funding to the front-lines more efficiently, for example. We hope that the Chamber revisits their position prior to its upcoming series of reports and recommendations.”

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