

Attn : Assignment Editor
For Immediate Release

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Charter Challenge against Medicare in Ontario opportunistic and dishonest: Health Coalition will defend the public system for Ontario patients

Toronto – The Ontario Health Coalition is releasing a strong reaction to today's announcement of a Charter challenge against single-tier public health care in this province.

"The idea that extra-billing by physicians and for-profit facilities will improve access to care would be laughable if it weren't such a grave threat to most middle class and working class people in this province," said Natalie Mehra, director of the Ontario Health Coalition.

"We have already seen for-profit clinics drain scarce health personnel out of the public system reducing access in public hospitals that provide services for free. Two-tiering and extra-billing are nothing but a way for greedy corporations and doctors-turned-into-businesspeople to make money from OHIP and get extra income on top. To pose this as any kind of a solution to wait times is misleading."

"There is a reason that Medicare was created in Canada: it was because people cannot afford private health care and the private system was a failure. The attempt by the far right-wing Canadian Constitution Foundation to paint supporters of public health care as causing the death of patients is shocking and absurd. In fact, the public health system has protected millions of Canadians from the perils of two-tier health care with its exorbitant charges and gross inequality. The Ontario Health Coalition notified its members of the challenge today and has declared its intent to intervene at every opportunity to protect the great gains in access and protection against user fees embodied in the *Commitment to the Future of Medicare Act* and other public health care legislation. We are calling upon all provincial parties leading into the fall election to commit to do the same. The dismantling of Medicare on behalf of private for-profit interests must not be allowed," said Ms. Mehra.

"The public Medicare system is entirely consistent with the Charter of Rights and Chaoulli did not decide otherwise. In fact, there is no social program that so well embodies the principles of the Charter as Medicare. We will defend these principles of equality and fairness against this and other opportunistic assaults," said lawyer Steven Shrybman, partner in the law firm Sack, Goldblatt, Mitchell.

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