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Patients demand Ford government reimburse wrongful charges at Ford's private clinics: more than 160 people join Day of Action at Ontario Legislature

Toronto – Patients who have been wrongfully charged for surgeries and diagnostic tests at private clinics were joined by more than 160 supporters at the Ontario Legislature today for a “Day of Action” to demand answers and action.

When he announced his government's plans to vastly expand privatization of Ontario's public hospitals' surgeries and diagnostic tests, Premier Ford said that [no patient would ever have to pay with their credit card, only their OHIP card](#). When asked if patients would have to pay anything if they had surgery at a private clinic, he swore it would be [“100 per cent” covered](#). [“We're never gonna waver from that”](#).

Such extra-billing and user fees are banned under the Canada Health Act and Ontario's Public Medicare protection laws, yet increasingly, the private clinics are charging patients with impunity, the Ontario Health Coalition reports.

In June, the Ontario Health Coalition sent a [formal letter to the Minister of Health](#) and to the Ministry with formal complaints from fifty patients who had been charged for care in private clinics. To date, not a single patient among those who made the complaints reports having been contacted to investigate their complaint.

Bruce Awad was charged more than \$1,000 for extra tests and lenses when he went for cataract surgery at a private clinic in Windsor. He was one of the patients included in the formal complaint to the Minister in June. "I am very upset that the government has not tried to contact me to investigate about this complaint," he said. "The complaint is serious. I am alleging that the government has misled us, lied to us about not having to pay for health care in Ontario, and I had to pay significantly. I think the government has to be held accountable for this."

"Usually, in any type of complaint with a government or organization, somebody investigates the complaint to verify the validity of it. But nothing has been done and it seems like they don't care. It seems like they think I'm going to forget about it or go away," he continued. "But \$1,100 is not something I'm going to forget. Especially when Doug Ford, on national television, said almost word-for-word that Ontarians won't have to pay with their credit card, only their OHIP card. That's a lie.... I'm just not going to go away and forget about the money I had to spend. I'm going to fight this until I get justice."

Dr. James Deutsch's wife was charged \$7,850 for cataract surgery at a private clinic in Toronto. He is also one of the people who made the formal complaint to the Ministry in June and he has never been contacted for an investigation. His wife Judith passed away in April and Dr. Deutsch made the complaint on her behalf. "I believe that they took advantage of her desperate situation and convinced her to opt for a more expensive lens and type of procedure for each eye. She was scared to go walking outside. She was not in a position to question," he said. "Having the profit incentive and leeway to charge more for a procedure can lead to situations like this, of selling services that are not necessary."

"We are demanding that the Ford government reimburse all the patients who have been wrongfully charged for surgeries and diagnostic tests in private clinics," said Natalie Mehra, executive director of the Ontario Health Coalition. "Patients are being lied to at the private clinics about wait times in public hospitals to convince them to pay outrageous charges. They are being told that OHIP-covered surgery has poor outcomes or is substandard to manipulate them into

paying on average \$3,500 – \$4,000 per eye at private cataract surgery clinics. They are being convinced that lenses that are not related to cataract surgery are somehow required for good outcomes for that surgery. Seniors on fixed incomes are having their savings wiped out, being forced back to work in retirement, or taking loans to pay for their surgeries. These things that should never happen in Canada.”

“Mr. Ford has repeatedly made promises that have turned out to be untrue,” she added. “He promised guardrails. In fact, there are no guardrails. We made formal complaints and nothing happened. Some patients have waited four months. Some have waited more than a year. They didn’t even contact the patients to investigate. No one has been reimbursed.”

The Coalition is demanding that all patients must be repaid for wrongful charges, the offending clinics be fined and subject to the suspension of their OHIP billings and loss of their licenses, as is required per the Commitment to the Future of Medicare Act (2004). The Coalition has researched under used operating rooms in public hospitals as a solution and found that [the majority of their operating rooms are closed the majority of the time](#) because they are not being given the funds to run them at full capacity. They are calling for the Ford government to ramp up funding and capacity in public hospitals and stop their expansion of for-profit clinics.

Ms. Mehra went on to clarify key patient information to counter the manipulative and false information patients are being told in order to convince them to pay:

- Patients should be warned that wait lists for cataract surgery in public hospitals are not long. Eighty percent of Ontario patients with the most urgent needs get their surgery within 47 days (7 weeks), according to [Ontario’s wait times tracking website](#). The lowest priority patients are operated on within 104 days (14 weeks).
- There is no “basic” lens. Physicians must assess and test all patients to determine the necessary individualized lens that the patient needs. This individualized lens is covered by OHIP.
- Extra tests and lenses are not needed for cataract surgery. Lenses that clinics are trying to sell for thousands of dollars are generally not to do with cataract surgery but other types of vision correction or changes. We hear from patients that some have good outcomes and some do not. Please research independently, not using commercial clinic websites, if you are being sold other types of lenses.
- Cataract and intraocular lens exchange surgeries are covered by OHIP regardless of how the surgery is performed (e.g., by laser or scalpel). Private clinics that claim otherwise are not telling the truth.
- Patients cannot be told to pay for unnecessary extra measurement tests and upgraded lenses to get the medically necessary surgery.
- No private clinic can tell patients that they can get care faster if they pay a fee.
- OHIP covered cataract surgery has good outcomes. Patients can have confidence in it.
- Eye drops required for cataract surgery are covered by OHIP.

A full fact sheet and information is available [here](#).

Despite the crisis of underfunding in our public hospitals, this summer the Ford government revealed plans to [spend \\$155 million in public money open 57 more private for-profit clinics](#) even though they cost more per surgery and they are charging patients illegal user fees on top. The Ford government is [funding private clinics \\$605 per eye for cataract surgery while the comparable funding for public hospitals is \\$500](#); they are funding a private hospital, [Clearpoint \(formerly Don Mills Surgical\)](#), [\\$1,264 for cataract surgery compared to \\$500 at public hospitals](#); Freedom of Information requests forced disclosure of the contracts for [private cataract surgery contract in Kingston, Ontario which show it is costing 56% more than public hospital costs](#). Ontario funds its public hospitals [at the lowest rate per person](#) (\$1,935 per capita for 2024) of any province in Canada.