



Patient Advocates File Formal Complaints from 50 Patients, Call for Urgent Action to Stop Illegal Fees in Private Clinics

Toronto – The Ontario Health Coalition was joined by patients from across Ontario in a [press conference](#) today as they announced that they have filed formal complaints on behalf of patients charged user fees for health care at private clinics. When the Ford government redirected resources away from public hospitals to expand private for-profit clinics the premier said, "No Ontarian will ever have to pay with a credit card. They will pay with their OHIP card."

In direct contradiction of that promise, the Coalition has gathered evidence -- including proof of payment and patient reports -- from fifty patients that are included in the formal complaint. The Coalition has received more than 200 complaints over the last year. These represent only a small fraction of the number of patients who are facing charges of hundreds to thousands of dollars when they go for cataract surgery in the private clinics.

Under the Canada Health Act, patients are supposed to be protected against user charges and extra-billing for medically needed surgeries, diagnostic tests and physician services. Selling queue jumping is not allowed. Patients are to have access to health care based on their medical need, not how wealthy they are. The federal government is to uphold the Act and require provinces to abide by it in order to receive full federal funding for health care. Under Ontario's laws, it is an offense for any person or entity to charge a patient for an OHIP covered service. No one can make access to needed care contingent on paying for medically unneeded things. Patients have the right to informed consent. Extra-billing, user fees, selling queue-jumping and manipulating patients into paying user fees are not allowed.

The Coalition wants patients to know that everything they need for cataract surgery is covered under OHIP, including eye measurement tests, lenses that are unique to their eye, ~~and~~ eye drops, appointments with physicians and follow up. Cataract surgery generally has very good outcomes. No one can charge a patient for cataract surgery, or the medically needed eye exams and eye drops associated with the surgery. Often patients end up paying for things that are not part of cataract surgery. Often patients are lied to about wait times in order to convince them to pay. Ontario has a [wait times website](#) that tracks the actual wait times for every part of the province. Most patients with urgent medical need are getting their cataract surgery within three-and-a-half months and those without urgent medical need are getting their surgery within seven months.

The Coalition outlined the types of complaints that they have received in two separate [open letters](#) to Sylvia Jones, Ontario's Minister of Health and to Marjorie Michel, Federal Health Minister. They called on the Ford government to reimburse the patients and take action to stop the private clinics. They asked the federal government to take all action possible to enforce the Canada Health Act in Ontario where the Ford government is violating it.

Quotes:

"Without question, patients – many of whom are elderly and on fixed incomes – are being exploited. They are being charged hundreds or even thousands of dollars, particularly when they go to private clinics for cataract surgeries," said Natalie Mehra, executive director of the Ontario Health Coalition. "Patients are using up their entire savings, their grocery money, and some have even had to go back to work long after retirement, in order to pay for their surgeries. This should never happen in Canada. We are demanding that the provincial government finally take action to stop the private clinics and that the federal government enforce the Canada Health Act in Ontario where the Ford government is violating it."

Maureen Munro from London was informed that she had macular degeneration and needed eye surgery urgently or she would lose her vision. She was told that she would have to pay or face two year wait lists (which was not true). She said, "I was informed the cost to receive the surgery would be almost \$7,000. Being as I live alone, I did not want to have macular degeneration, nor lose my quality of life. Therefore, I paid the \$7,000 in 2022. Being a senior on a fixed income, I am still trying to catch up with bills from this surgery."

David Kauk from Kitchener-Waterloo was charged \$250 for eye measurement tests and then a week before the surgery, the surgeon told him he would have to pay \$1,100 per eye. He refused to pay and had to go elsewhere. He said, "I feel that I was misled throughout the process and was kept in the dark until the final minute."

Diana Ralph from Ottawa was told that the OHIP-covered cataract surgery was "old fashioned" and was charged \$400 for the diagnostic exam. The clinic tried to charge her \$1,300 for the surgery but she did not pay and went elsewhere. She said, "I felt offended by the dishonest and manipulative hard-sell and chose to not get the surgery at that private clinic."

Jules Tupker and his wife from Thunder Bay were each charged \$225 (for a total of \$550) for eye measurements when they went in to a private clinic. He said, "I contacted the Ministry of Health to make a complaint. That was after my surgery in October. I never heard back from them."