



MEDIA RELEASE

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Patients who have been extra-billed for surgeries in private for-profit clinics demand accountability in the Ontario election: Press conferences in towns across Ontario

When he denied that his privatization plan would lead to two-tier medicare, Doug Ford [promised unequivocally](#), "No Ontarian will ever have to pay with a credit card. They will pay with their OHIP card." He garnered headlines across Ontario with that statement on January 11, 2023 while he announced his plans to expand the for-profit privatization of surgeries and diagnostics. In direct contradiction to Ford's pledge, patients are now routinely charged hundreds or even thousands of dollars in private clinics and nothing is being done to stop it, reports the Ontario Health Coalition.

On Tuesday, the Coalition held press conferences with patients who have been charged for cataract surgeries or manipulated into paying for medically unnecessary add-ons in private clinics in Toronto, Ottawa, London and Windsor. The Coalition is calling on all political parties to make clear commitments to stop the privatization of our health care services and penalize those that are charging patients illegally and unethically.

Most of the for-profit clinics that have opened and expanded to date under Ford's plan are cataract surgery clinics. His government has given a number of large volume contracts to for-profit cataract clinics including at least one chain that is charging patients \$3,000 – \$4,000+ per eye for cataract surgeries in different communities across Ontario.

In the past year alone, the Coalition has received several hundred survey responses and inquiries from patients about being illegally charged user fees and/or manipulatively upsold, mainly for cataract surgery. Patients frequently report being charged \$200 or more for extra eye measurements with no discussion. Many are charged thousands of dollars to access the surgery without the option to not pay or are manipulatively upsold, with one woman in Ottawa being quoted \$11,000 – the highest number the Coalition has ever seen.

"This has to be an election issue. It is illegal to charge patients for needed surgeries. It is illegal to sell queue jumping for the wealthy to get health care first and push everyone else back in line. It is both illegal and unethical to manipulate patients into buying unnecessary services pretending they are needed, or are "upgrades" when they actually serve different purposes, or that outcomes are poor if they do not pay, and/or to lie to patients about the wait times for surgery in public hospitals in order to convince them to pay thousands of dollars to get access to care," noted Natalie Mehra, executive director of the Ontario Health Coalition which is a non-partisan citizens group that has advocated to safeguard and improve public health care for more than 40 years.

"Let us be absolutely clear. No Ontarian can be charged for their cataract surgery, including the unique lens they need for that surgery and the eye measurement tests and eye drops needed for that surgery. Yet elderly patients are being required to pay increasingly outrageous amounts of money for their surgeries in violation of our medicare laws that explicitly make such charges illegal," she reported, asking the media to please help make this clear to patients.

"Doug Ford must be accountable for his government's record on health care privatization and the dismantling and privatization of our public health care must stop."

The Coalition is warning that patients will be subject to even more exorbitant charges for joint replacement surgeries, MRIs, CTs and other services if Ford's plan to expand privatization continues, noting that there are clear alternatives. The Coalition gathered data from across Ontario and [released a report](#) showing that Ontario's public hospitals have

operating rooms that are sitting unused because they are not funded to hire staff and run them full time, while the government has shifting millions of public dollars to expand for-profit clinics that are both charging OHIP and charging patients extra user fees on top. Ontario funds its public hospitals [at the lowest rate](#) per person of any province.

Patient stories:

Please note: DO NOT believe the wait times you are being told. The highest priority patients in Ontario are waiting just 3 weeks for their specialist appointment and get their surgery within 2 months. Patients are frequently lied to about the wait times in order to persuade them to pay extra user fees for their surgery. Please see <https://www.ontario.ca/page/wait-times-ontario> to look up the real wait time in your area.

- David McIntosh was told there would be long wait if he got cataract surgery in a public hospital. He was referred to a private clinic and charged \$8,000 for lenses, eye drops, follow-up care, and astigmatism correction. He was never given the choice to not pay in order to get cataract surgery.
- Maureen Munro's optometrist told her that cataract surgery would cost about \$3,000 unless she wanted to wait "two years to have it done through OHIP". She was referred to a private clinic that said she was starting to have macular degeneration and charged her \$7,000 to receive the surgery.
- Diana Ralph was told that she could get cataract surgery within 6 months if she opted for the specialized surgery of \$1,300 with a \$400 diagnostic assessment but that it would take "over a year" if all she wanted was "basic" cataract surgery. The clinic implied that she'd be left with inferior vision if she chose the "old-fashioned basic" surgery. After she was charged \$400 for the assessment and reluctantly agreed to pay the \$1,300, the clinic informed her that it likely would still take up to a year to get the surgery. She decided to not get the surgery at this private clinic.
- Ann Lauzon was charged \$280 for eye measurements with no choice as to do them or not. She was told that she could get the "OHIP-covered" lenses but that they weren't good or the best. She was charged \$900 for special lenses and just more than \$900 when she had the surgery. Ann was also charged more than \$150 for eye drops.
- Bruce Awad's optometrist told him that there was a very long waiting list to have cataract surgery at a hospital but that a private clinic could do it within a few weeks. The private clinic charged him \$280 for eye exams they said he needed in order to get the surgery through them. They also charged him \$900 for a special lens, implying that it was better than the "OHIP-covered" lens. They also urged him to get cataract surgery on both eyes, which he got, even though his optometrist said he could opt to have only one eye done.
- Ken Harten was told that he would get better and more accurate results by paying \$500 for a measurement test and \$340 for upgraded lenses. In addition, his nephew who was developmentally delayed and, for all intents and purposes, blind due to cataracts was told that it would be up to two years before he could get the surgery. However, Ken and his nephew were told that it could be done within weeks for \$3,400. They were also told that they'd get better outcomes if they paid for special lenses.
- Sharon Lindemberger was told that the wait to get cataract surgery in a public hospital would be 15 months and that the lenses offered in private clinics were "far superior". She was charged more than \$6,000.
- Andraena Tilgner's mother-in-law was told by her optometrist that it would take two years to have cataract surgery in her left eye through the public system. She was referred to a private clinic where she was charged for eye measurements and a \$150 administrative fee. She was also convinced to have cataract surgery on both eyes and corrective laser surgery. When all was said and done, she was handed a bill for \$7,390.