

Medicare Advocates Call on Chrétien to Stand Up to Privatizing Premiers

OTTAWA -- Supporters of Medicare are calling on Prime Minister Jean Chrétien to protect the integrity of public health care and not appease Premier Klein and other premiers advocating for-profit health care.

At a briefing before the First Ministers meeting in Ottawa, groups working with the Canadian Health Coalition made clear their bottom line going into the talks. They want an agreement to strengthen and modernize public health care that ensures federal health dollars go to public, not-for-profit care.

"We know what Ralph Klein wants - more federal cash to speed up the privatization of Alberta's health care system," said Christine Burdett who chairs Friends of Medicare, an Alberta provincial coalition. "The question is whether Jean Chrétien has the backbone to defend Canadians' interests and stand up to the premiers who see health care as a business opportunity."

Canadians don't want their health care dollars going to corporate profits according to Judy Darcy, National President of the Canadian Union of Public Employees. "Chrétien is thinking about his legacy. The premiers are thinking about elections. He wants them to cut a deal. They want him to cut a cheque.

But Canadians are clear. They want strings attached to federal health spending - and they want to make sure every penny of their health dollar goes to patient care and essential support services - not a penny for profits."

"The provinces want a blank cheque without addressing the critical issues of profit and privatization. Profit diverts dollars from care, and privatization opens us up to trade agreement attacks," said Council of Canadians chairperson Maude Barlow. "The feds must take a stand against for-profit delivery. The fact is ownership matters. For-profit delivery matters.

Patients are more likely to die in a private hospital or a clinic run for-profit. The evidence on this is clear."

The Canadian Health Coalition points to the 40,000 signatures on its online petition supporting the Romanow recommendations and calling for greater accountability as evidence the public isn't buying Klein's position that the provinces know best.

"Canadians want guarantees that wherever they are in Canada they can get quality health care when they need it," said coalition coordinator Mike McBane. "To do this, it's not enough to increase spending. We need to expand and strengthen public health care and we need the federal government to take an active leadership role to enforce national standards. That's what Romanow found and that's what Canadians want."

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