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# Wait-time guarantees called benefit for private clinics

*By Andrea Sands*

EDMONTON - Prime Minister Stephen Harper's plan to implement patient wait-time guarantees will bolster private health care and pad the pocketbooks of Canada's elite, says the head of an organization promoting the public health system.

The national co-ordinator of the Canadian Health Coalition, Michael McBane, told about 60 Friends of Medicare members in a speech Saturday that the "virus" of guaranteed wait times will spread private clinics at the expense of the publicly funded medicare system.

"Norway, Sweden and Denmark all tried this," McBane said. "They all abandoned it because it was a complete failure."

Harper has promised that public insurance will foot the bill for Canadians who receive medical treatment at a private clinic or in another jurisdiction because they couldn't get care quickly enough at home.

"We want the wait times fixed in the public system," McBane told reporters after his speech.

"We don't want an airline ticket somewhere else. That doesn't build the capacity and that doesn't help get us nurses and doctors."

By giving private health care a boost, guaranteed wait times will also benefit the affluent, McBane suggested. They currently pay more in taxes but get no preferential health-care treatment for their money. Pushing for widespread use of private clinics is an attempt by some of the elite "to get better access without paying taxes for it," he said.

"It's in their interest because rich people generally are healthier, obviously they have more money and so it's in their economic interest to try to convince governments to allow the emergence of a private health-care system."

Harper intends to negotiate a patient wait-times guarantee with the provinces, establishing benchmarks for timely care.