

Privatisation: Leading Canada's Public Healthcare to the "Free-market Guillotine"

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National discussion in Canada on the Conservative government's new healthcare financial ultimatum, a take-it-or-leave-it-style proposal, largely revolves around myths. First that financing alone is key to securing a sustainable public healthcare system and second that free-market economic winds will provide sustainable guidelines, via GDP, for viable future government healthcare financing.

A surprise delivery from Conservative Finance Minister Jim Flaherty to provincial finance ministers, over a fancy lunch-in at the Chateau Victoria Hotel this past Monday, the plan offers no space for negotiation toward collective national solutions for public healthcare.

Essentially, the Conservative proposal works to strip federal responsibility in crafting, via national negotiations, coherent and sustainable healthcare systems in Canada's provinces and territories. A clear move away from the flawed but important Canada Health Act and a political node to provincial governments already working to allocate federal healthcare financing toward enhancing the corporate, for-profit sector role in delivering healthcare, as already seen extensively in Alberta and Québec.

In reality, the Conservative plan will see six per cent healthcare funding increases until the 2016-17 fiscal year, with little regulation over provincial governments increasing experimentation with public-private partnerships. Beyond 2016-17 the plan is to bind federal healthcare spending to GDP growth, a fundamentally dangerous move toward codifying Canada's public healthcare into capitalist economic terms.

Essentially, the Conservative deal stands as cash for healthcare in the near future and uncertainty for the long term. Cash solutions are never long-term solutions to collective challenges, fast money and free market thinking will not solve the deep problems facing public healthcare in Canada.

Beyond important calls for the Conservative government to negotiate viable terms to sustain public healthcare in Canada, with politicians from provincial and territorial governments, also note that zero official opportunity for the people of Canada to contribute ideas toward the future of public healthcare have been outlined.

In reality, a viable and democratic process in Canada, relating to public healthcare's future, would encourage neighbourhood assemblies and participatory political processes coast-to-coast, similar to the general assembly model celebrated by the Occupy movement.

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