



## Federal Election 2004

# HOW THE LIBERALS HAVE HURT PUBLIC HEALTH CARE

The actions of successive Liberal governments have put public health services at risk. By failing to pay their fair share of health care costs and opening the door to privatization, the Liberals are making Canadians wait for care while creating opportunities for their business backers to pocket huge profits.

In 1995, the Liberals deleted Section 6 of the *Canada Health Act* in order to restrict funding to physician and hospital services. This made it easier for other health care services to be delivered by for-profit corporations.

During his nine years as finance minister, Paul Martin cut federal health funding by 40 per cent setting the stage for provincial hospital closures and cuts to essential health services. As a result, private for-profit clinics flourish in BC, Alberta, Quebec and Nova Scotia contrary to the *Canada Health Act*.

Liberals continue to promote public private partnerships, ignoring the risk they represent to the principles of the *Canada Health Act*. During the entire Liberal regime, not one violation of the five principles of the Act has been investigated, and no penalties have been levied.

The Liberals commissioned the Romanow Commission and the National Forum on Health and then ignored their recommendations to strengthen public health care by including pharmacare and home care. Government trade negotiators have continued to put Medicare at risk in trade talks.

Paul Martin surrounds himself with advisors who are insiders in the for-profit health care world. Martin's team includes:

- Mike Robinson, a former lobbyist for MDS – a private, for-profit health care deliverer.
- Bruce Young, senior BC adviser in the PMO and a former lobbyist for a dozen private, for-profit health clinics in BC.
- John McKay, Parliamentary secretary for public private partnerships and Canada's first Cabinet-level proponent of P3 privatization.



- Paul Boothe, associate deputy minister in Finance. Boothe, an Alberta economist, advocates expanding for-profit delivery of health services and opposes increasing federal cash transfers to the provinces for health care. He helped draft Alberta Premier Ralph Klein's response to former Conservative cabinet minister Don Mazankowski's report on health care. Boothe agreed with Mazankowski's privatization plans saying, "We also have to look at using a new mix of providers, a combination of public, private and non-profit partners, to deliver services effectively."

Health Minister Pierre Pettigrew showed the Liberal's true colours by delivering a major speech in which he accepts "private delivery" of health services. Pettigrew says Liberal policy isn't public delivery of health care: "For instance, there are flexibilities in that Act that deserve to be explored. ... It is not the public ownership, it's the public management of things."

Just days away from an election call, Prime Minister Martin jerked Pettigrew back into line and had Pettigrew issue a statement that he now supports "public delivery" of health care. But the damage is already done. We all know Martin, his advisors and the federal health minister are open to private for-profit delivery of health services.

## Why the Tories are no better

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Conservative Party leader Stephen Harper supports the Liberals and the 2003 Health Accord. In Parliament, Harper, then leader of the Alliance Party, congratulated the Liberals because the Accord contains, "no restrictions on private health care delivery within the public system." Liberal and Alliance MPs shared a bizarre, joint standing ovation. Since then, Harper has confirmed his support for the Accord because it "allowed for flexibility of delivery options within the public health care system...."

Harper sees no problem with provinces experimenting with private sector delivery of vital health services like CAT scans, MRIs and elective surgery.

Harper's support for private for-profit health services is clear when he says, "it does not matter who delivers health care; it matters who can receive it."



## What the NDP says

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The NDP is the only party that has consistently defended Medicare as a system that should be publicly funded and publicly delivered.

The NDP will:

- strengthen the *Canada Health Act* to prohibit public money from being spent on private, for-profit hospitals and public private partnerships.
- ensure that diagnostic services such MRIs are deemed to be medically necessary, protecting them for privatization.
- enforce the principles and conditions of the *Canada Health Act* to stop provincial abuses.
- restore federal funding to 25 per cent of total health expenditures.

## What we want

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We want a government that will:

- stop private, for-profit P3 hospitals and private clinics.
- increase federal funding for health care to 25 per cent on the condition that citizens' money is not directed to for-profit care.
- support public delivery of all health services including food, housekeeping and laundry.
- expand public health care to include pharmacare and home care
- respect, enforce and strengthen the *Canada Health Act*.
- exclude health care from all trade deals.

