

# Should there be more space for healthcare privatization in Canada?

## **General background**

"Medicare" is a term that refers to Canada's publicly-funded healthcare system. Instead of having a single national plan, Canadians have 13 provincial and territorial healthcare insurance plans. Under this system, all Canadians have access to medically necessary hospital and physician services without paying out-of-pocket.

The roles and responsibilities for healthcare services are shared between provincial and territorial governments and the federal government. The provincial and territorial governments are responsible for the management, organization and delivery of healthcare services for their residents.

In recent years, healthcare systems across Canada have experienced increased wait times for services, including for medically-necessary procedures and in emergency rooms, sometimes leading to tragic consequences. For example, in November 2023, a patient in a Winnipeg ER died after waiting over 33 hours for bed. Only a month later, in Québec, two patients died while waiting to be treated in an emergency room that had been operating at double its capacity for weeks. This ongoing situation has also led to doctors and nurses working longer hours, reporting higher rates of burnout, and, in some cases, leaving the profession entirely.

While the vast majority of doctors in Canada operate under Medicare, it is possible for them to opt-out (with the exception of doctors in Ontario). Doctors who opt out of medicare charge their patients entirely out-of-pocket for their services. However, in most provinces, significant barriers exist in order to limit private practice. Québec is the only province where a significant number of doctors work in private clinics.

Some have argued that creating greater space for private healthcare delivery could help ease the burden on public clinics and hospitals, reduce wait times, and help retain staff. However, opponents argue that private healthcare comes at a steep cost to taxpayers, as private clinics charge well above the cost of procedures in public settings. There are also concerns that opening the door to privatized healthcare is a first step towards dismantling the public healthcare system.

## **For more information:**

- [Private healthcare is here](#)
- [Canada's health care crunch has become 'horrific and inhumane', doctors warn](#)
- [Why patients are waiting so long in emergency rooms across Canada](#)