

BULLETIN

Does the federal government even care about health care?

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The results of the 2015 federal election will have a critical impact on many issues, but none more so than health care.

Canada's federal government was essential in establishing our public health care system. It continues to have a crucial leadership role to play in improving and expanding Medicare. Leadership is needed not only in helping to fund health care services, but also in setting national standards for health care programs - so that no matter where we live in Canada, our families receive the same quality of care in hospitals, in the community or in our homes.

Unfortunately, for most of the last decade Canada's federal government has not only abdicated its responsibility for health care, it has actually taken steps that are damaging our health care system. They have refused to enforce the Canada Health Act, negotiate a new Health Accord with the provinces, set national standards for essential programs such as home care and residential care, or establish a national, universal program to provide prescription drug coverage.

HSA member and BC Health Coalition co-chair Rachel Tutte believes the federal government has been moving in the wrong direction with health care.

"The Conservatives walked away from discussions with the provinces to control the cost of drugs and create a national Pharmacare program. They refused to even engage in discussions with the provinces to negotiate a new Health Accord to determine the level of federal funding for health care, and set national standards for critical health care programs. They shut down the Health Council of Canada, and cut health care benefits for veterans. They slashed refugee health coverage - and have refused to reinstate many of these benefits even after the Federal Court declared the cuts unconstitutional. They refuse to enforce the Canada Health Act's provisions that protect patients from user fees and extra billing. And they have walked away from providing funding and national standards for home and community care for our seniors."

In BC, this lack of federal leadership has been a major factor in the growth of for-profit health care, to the point where we now have two private for-profit clinics run by Dr. Brian Day, both trying to use the courts to destroy Medicare and open the door to US-style, commercial health care.

HSA members have felt the effects of this lack of federal leadership as they struggle with shrinking resources and greater needs. And the patients and residents they serve are the ones who suffer for it.

These negative impacts are expected to become even more severe starting in the 2017-2018 fiscal year, when the reduction in federal funding under the Health Accord goes into effect. It's estimated this will deprive the health care system of \$36 billion in federal funding during the following 10 years, including a reduction of \$5

billion in BC.

"Instead of ongoing cuts, we need federal leadership that will require the provinces to expand the range of services provided by our public health care system," says Tutte. "The federal government must establish a national, universal program providing prescription drug coverage, and national standards to improve home and community care for seniors. And they must provide adequate federal funding to enable the provinces to deliver these services."

"It's time for a change. It's time to elect a federal government that cares about health care."

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