

FACT SHEET: Health Care Building healthy communities

Canadians count on public health care to be there when we need it. But negotiations underway at the World Trade Organization (WTO) seriously threaten Medicare's future. Corporations see Canada's public health care system as a missed business opportunity. To cash in, corporations are using the WTO's General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) to get their hands on health care.

Corporations are eager to move into Canada and government funding cuts have left hospitals, home care, nursing homes and other health care providers vulnerable to corporate moneymaking schemes.

Federal government claims that health care is protected from the privatizing scope of the GATS don't tell the real story. Only those health care services delivered and funded completely by government are exempt from the GATS. Public health care is not shielded from the GATS, because Canada's mixed health care system relies on public, not-for-profit providers and a growing number of private, for-profit providers. Worse yet, the Canadian government has put public health insurance on the GATS trading table.

The terms of the deal are wide-ranging, promoting corporate profits over human rights. The GATS will speed up and lock in the creeping privatization of Canada's public health care system. It will also prevent Canada from introducing new, public innovations that could strengthen our health system, such as national home care and prescription drug programs. Foreign corporations will be able to demand the right to provide these services.

The WTO's plan for public health care includes:

- **Foreign, for-profit hospitals in Canada** – The GATS guarantees foreign corporations a piece of the Canadian market, especially now that some provinces have followed Alberta's lead in ushering in private, for-profit health care.
- **Exploited labour** – While importing cheap labour and moving other work such as data entry and patient records offshore, health corporations will also move patients in and out of the country, wherever wages are cheapest.
- **Profits from illness** – Our public health insurance system will be opened up to competition from for-profit insurers.
- **Corporate welfare** – The GATS will prohibit governments from giving preference to public health care and instead allow private, for-profit corporations to force their way in, bidding for and delivering health care services paid for with public dollars.
- **Unhealthy communities** – Private, for-profit health corporations will have no requirement to serve the interests of the people where they operate – only the interests of those who can afford to pay. There will be no requirements for local hiring or community accountability.
- **Downward spiral** – GATS requirements that countries harmonize their standards will speed privatization. Americans won't introduce public health care to meet Canada's high standards. Canada's system will be ratcheted down to match the US system of Health Maintenance Organizations, corporations that are keen for a Canadian market. The US system is so bad that 43 million citizens have no health coverage at all.
- **Corporate standards** – The WTO will review standards and regulations for health services and facilities according to what will make the most money, not what are the healthiest, best and safest practices. Anything seen as restricting trade and profits will be challenged, using the WTO's powerful and secretive dispute resolution process.

Public health care is a right!