

FACT SHEET: Social Services Building caring communities

Social services help us care for the most vulnerable among us – and for each other in tough times. Dedicated CUPE members in communities across Canada provide this care. We work for local governments and community-based non-profit organizations.

But the World Trade Organization (WTO) sees Canada’s social services as a missed business opportunity. To cash in, multinational corporations, eager to make big profits, are using the WTO’s General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) to open up Canadian social services for an all-out take-over. At the unelected WTO, corporate lobbyists are telling governments to “reconsider the breadth and depth of their commitments on health and social services.”

Only those social services delivered and funded completely by government are exempt from the GATS. This means that social services are not protected from the privatizing influence of the GATS, because we have a mixed system with community non-profits working alongside public social services and a growing number of private, for-profit providers.

The privatization of Canada’s social services will be reinforced by wide-reaching GATS rules that will force public services to compete with foreign owned companies. Governments will be barred from favouring not-for-profit providers or considering local needs and community standards.

Our jobs, our communities, our future

Quality care requires continuity – not corner-cutting. This means consistent support from social services staff and assured long-term funding. We want our loved ones to be protected and get the best care possible. This takes regulations and standards that meet the needs of society and protect us all.

Privatization and deregulation of social services have already taken a huge toll. Families and individuals have been put at risk and our communities have suffered. The GATS will only make the situation worse, and will ensure there’s no going back. Social services cannot be run for profit: no gain from people’s pain.

The WTO's plan for social services includes:

- **Corporate standards** – The WTO will review social services standards and regulations 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.
- **Declining quality** – Competitive bidding doesn't lead to quality service. For-profit social services corporations will use cutbacks and layoffs to save money and guarantee shareholder profits.
- **Rich, gated communities and loss of local control** – Under the GATS, private, for-profit social services corporations have no requirement to hire locally or serve the interests of the people where they operate. Local governments will be prohibited from giving preference to local suppliers. Those who can afford services will be able to buy the best in a two-tier system.
- **Corporate welfare** – Taxpayers will pay the debts, bailouts, incentives and subsidies to private companies that have no obligation to keep their profits in Canada.
- **Exploited and migrant labour** – Data entry and record work will be electronically transferred anywhere wages are low. Wages fall as international recruitment opens up and foreign social services providers increase the staff they send to Canada on a temporary basis.
- **Lower standards** – Americans won't introduce more public social services to harmonize with Canada. Canada will be forced to lower our standards to welcome for-profit social services corporations that are keen for a Canadian "market".

Social Services are a right!