

news release

BC HEALTH COALITION

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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B.C. penalized by federal government for *Canada Health Act* violations

The B.C. Health Coalition is calling for an immediate investigation of private surgical clinic billing practices after learning the B.C. government was penalized by the federal government for two separate violations of the *Canada Health Act* in March.

And while the fine will likely have a small impact on the provincial treasury, health coalition coordinator Terrie Hendrickson says the news has huge implications for B.C. patients and predicts that these violations represent just the tip of the iceberg.

“Under this government’s nose, patients are being charged by private companies for publicly insured health services,” says Hendrickson. “And by tolerating this practice, our government is putting us on a fast track to two-tier health care.

“Our health services minister insists that it can privatize thousands of surgical procedures without violating the *Canada Health Act*,” adds Hendrickson. “But even now, it’s clear that the province is unable or unwilling to police private clinics.”

Just last week, in response to allegations in the press that a now defunct private cataract clinic in North Vancouver had allowed queue jumping, health services minister Colin Hansen said he needed a patient to come forward.

“It’s not acceptable for the provincial government to sit back and wait for complaints to come in,” says Hendrickson. “We need Victoria and its health authorities to proactively monitor private clinics and enforce the law.

“Without such action, the health services minister is just paying lip service to the principles of medicare.”

Hendrickson says Hansen must take immediate steps to investigate the billing practices of private clinics.

And the health coalition also wants Hansen to release details of these medicare violations and ban the private clinics involved from bidding on any surgical contracts from public bodies including health authorities, the Insurance Corporation of British Columbia and the Workers’ Compensation Board.

The group is also calling for an immediate moratorium on health privatization.

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