



August 9, 2022

Hon. Doug Ford
Premier of Ontario
premier@ontario.ca

Hon. Sylvia Jones
Minister of Health
sylvia.jones@ontario.ca

Subject: Ensure universal access to healthcare services independent of insurance status

Dear Premier Ford and Minister Jones,

We are writing to urge the Government of Ontario to implement a permanent program to ensure access to healthcare services for all people living in Ontario, independent of insurance status.

In March 2020, your government removed long-standing barriers to medically necessary care for people in Ontario without health insurance.¹ This included two milestone changes: 1) the removal of the three-month waiting period for OHIP coverage, and 2) funding for physician and hospital services for individuals without public health insurance.

Prior to March 2020, it is estimated that about half a million children and adults living in Ontario did not have public health insurance at any given time.² Without public health insurance, we know that children and their families are less likely to seek or receive necessary health care. In fact, when uninsured individuals present at emergency rooms, their health conditions are 43% more likely to be classified as severe in comparison to insured individuals.³ No child in Ontario should be forced to suffer unnecessarily, be denied care, or have their health and well-being compromised due to a lack of insurance.

The removal of the three-month waiting period and access to hospital and physician care for uninsured people has significantly benefited the people of Ontario, as well as its health care providers, hospitals, and the healthcare system at large. Turning patients away or denying needed services increases moral distress in healthcare providers, many of whom are already experiencing significant levels of stress and burnout.⁴ In addition to the fundamental responsibility to uphold the principles of access, equity and universality enshrined in the *Canada Health Act*, the downstream social and economic benefits of reducing illness and injury by ensuring all Ontarians have access to adequate healthcare is significant.

We therefore call on the Government of Ontario to implement a permanent program to ensure access to all healthcare services for all people living in Ontario. To deny care to anyone, leaving them at risk of severe illness or death, is simply unacceptable.

Sincerely,

Mark Feldman MD, FRCPC
CPS President

Kim Dow, MD, FRCPC
CPS Board Member

Eddy Lau, MD, FRCPC
CPS Board Member

Malini Dave, MD, FRCPC, FAAP
Co-Chair, PAO

Jane Liddle, MD, FRCPC, FAAP
Co-Chair, PAO

Saba Merchant, MD, FRCPC
Chair, Pediatrics Section OMA

¹ Health Services Branch, Ministry of Health. OHIP Bulletin 4749, March 2020:

<https://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/ohip/bulletins/4000/bul4749.aspx> (Accessed July 28, 2022).

² Nicholas Keung, Are thousands of uninsured people about to lose health coverage in Ontario? Fears grow about end to COVID-era OHIP rules. Toronto Star, July 2022: <https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2022/07/28/health-care-providers-urge-ontario-to-keep-providing-free-care-to-the-uninsured.html> (Accessed July 28, 2022).

³ Hynie M, Ardern CI, Robertson A. Emergency Room Visits by Uninsured Child and Adult Residents in Ontario, Canada: What Diagnoses, Severity and Visit Disposition Reveal About the Impact of Being Uninsured. J Immigr Minor Health 2016;18(5):948-956.

⁴ Siu, C, Rao, S, Hayman, K. et al. Exploring the perspectives of healthcare providers that care for non-insured individuals utilizing emergency departments in Toronto. Can J Emerg Med 2022;24:283–287.