

June 2013

CANADA: Insist that refugees have a right to basic healthcare

If you have a bad ear ache, chances are you will go to the doctor for medicine to treat an infection.

But what if you are a newly arrived refugee in Canada? Will a doctor see you and, if you need them, send you for more tests?

In June 2012, the government of Canada changed the way it provides basic healthcare to refugees in Canada under a program called the Interim Federal Health Program (IFHP). Some refugees who have come to Canada in search of safety are now being denied basic, emergency, and life-saving medical care.

The changes to IFHP are a problem. There are now five different categories of health coverage for refugees, causing confusion for both refugees and healthcare providers. Refugees are treated differently according to what country they have come from, where they are in the refugee process, and how they came to Canada. This means that some refugees cannot see a doctor. And some are denied treatment because it is not clear if they are eligible for care.

When people are denied preventative or primary healthcare, it can put their life at risk. For example, a diabetic could die without insulin. Denying treatment can also increase the cost of healthcare when a problem becomes a crisis in need of emergency intervention.



Healthcare professionals rally in June 2012 against the cuts to healthcare for refugees
Photo credit: rabble.ca

Some refugees have healthcare needs because they are survivors of extreme violence or are exhausted from lengthy journeys to safety. It is important to take care of all of their healthcare needs so they can fully participate in their new life in Canada.

Some doctors are so concerned about the changes in healthcare for refugees that they have taken the issue to court. They want the cuts to healthcare for refugee claimants to be declared both unconstitutional and illegal.

Amnesty International is deeply concerned that changes to the IFHP are discriminatory and will result in violations of the right to health of refugees in Canada.

Access to healthcare for all is a fundamental human right, enshrined in international human rights treaties that Canada had agreed to respect.



WHAT CAN I DO?

Please write to Canada's Minister of Citizenship and Immigration.

- Start your message Dear Minister Kenney.
- Tell the Minister why you think healthcare is important for everyone.
- Remind him that access to healthcare is a fundamental human right. Refugees should not be treated differently according to the country they have come from, how they arrived in Canada or what stage they are at in the refugee process.
- Ask him to reverse the cuts to Refugee Health Care.

WHERE DO I SEND MY MESSAGE?

The Honourable Jason Kenney
Minister of Citizenship and Immigration
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6

Postage: None required
Fax: (613) 992-1920
Email: jason.kenney@parl.gc.ca



WHAT ELSE CAN I DO?

Ask someone else in your community to send this message, postage-free, to the Minister:

Dear Minister Kenney,

Everyone in Canada should have access to the healthcare they need to get well and to prevent health problems from getting worse.

Please reverse the cuts to Refugee Health Care.