

## **Ralph Klein's Latest: Right Idea, Wrong Implementation**

Released – January 23, 2002

Ralph Klein is right to raise taxes to support health care, the Medical Reform Group said today. He is wrong to raise those taxes through health premiums. Klein is right to consider what services are essential to health. But instead of cutting services, he should be extending coverage of medically necessary home care, drug, and dental services.

"Klein and other Canadian politicians have been misleading the public about health care costs," said MRG spokesperson Dr. Rosana Pellizzari. "In the last 10 years health care costs have grown more slowly than the rest of the economy. The public has said they are willing to pay for equitable delivery of essential health services. Public delivery of health services is both efficient and just, and collecting the taxes necessary to deliver those services make sense."

"But health premiums are the wrong way to collect those taxes," Pellizzari continued. "They are a form of regressive taxation: since everyone pays the same irrespective of income, the poor are paying a much higher proportion of their income than the rich. The money to pay for health should come from the general tax pool, where the rich pay more than the poor."

Klein also announced a panel to look at what services should be covered. "We've had a number of such panels across Canada in the last ten years," said another MRG spokesperson, Ahmed Bayoumi. "Their conclusions are all the same: virtually all currently covered physician and hospital services are necessary to maintain peoples' health. This review is a waste of time unless it considers whether to extend coverage."

Currently prescription drugs, home care, glasses, and dental care are covered only for populations like the elderly and those on social assistance, and when covered are only partially covered. "The reality is that many essential services remain user-pay," Dr. Bayoumi said. "The poor elderly suffer from inadequate home care. Parents of poor children can't afford a dentist for their kids. Over 15% of Canadians can't pay for their prescription drugs. These are real unmet health care needs that a panel to look at medically necessary services should be considering."