

The Dishonest Debate

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An analysis by the Medical Reform group shows that the Torie provincial governments new budget fails to make up for years of health care cutbacks.

"The Conservative government has a new buzzword, open and honest debate", commented MRG spokesperson Rosana Pellizzari, "but there is nothing honest about the way they distort the facts concerning health care spending."

Mike Harris and health minister Tony Clement talk about absolute spending increases, and about the proportion of the provincial budget spent on health care. Both ways of presenting the data are extremely misleading.

There are five things wrong with absolute spending increases as a measure of adequate health resource expenditure. First, absolute increases don't take inflation in to account. Second, they don't take population growth in to account. Third, they ignore increases in need, including the aging population and expensive advances in medical care. Fourth, they don't consider the growth in the economy. Fifth, they ignore the decrease in per capita health care spending that occurred in Canada from 1992 to 1997.

We need inflation-adjusted per capita spending, or health spending as a proportion of the GDP, to give us an accurate picture. Since 1995, when the Tories came to power, government health spending as a percentage of the provincial GDP has dropped from 5.7 to 5.3%.

Describing spending as a proportion of the provincial budget is even more misleading. In total, the Tories have cut government spending as a proportion of the GDP from 16% to 12%. That's a 25% cut. The proportion of the budget spent on health is going up because health spending, as a proportion of GDP is going down, but spending on other areas such as education, social assistance, and environmental protection is decreasing much more.

"The 1.2 billion increase in the budget, after adjusting for inflation and population growth, is peanuts," Dr. Pellizzari concluded. "That's the honest analysis."