

McGuinty slammed for private clinics

TORONTO -- Ontario's Liberal government is flouting its own law that protects universal access to publicly funded medicare by allowing another private health clinic to open in Toronto, the opposition parties charged Monday.

Provis Infusion Clinic is charging up to \$70,000 for cancer treatments that have been approved by Health Canada, but are not covered by the Ontario Health Insurance Plan.

"This is the Mount Everest of broken promises for Dalton McGuinty," said Conservative health critic John Baird.

"Now that they're in government, it's like an all-you-can-eat buffet of private health care."

NDP Leader Howard Hampton said allowing private clinics is a betrayal of Ontario's public medicare system, and flouts the Commitment to the Future of Medicare Act of 2004, which outlawed two-tier medicine, extra billing and user fees.

"Dalton McGuinty is letting down ordinary families," he said.

"They shouldn't have to pay out of their pockets, let alone mortgage their homes," to get the health care they need.

But a Health Ministry spokesman said Provis is not breaking any laws because the cancer drug the clinic is charging thousands of dollars to administer is not yet covered by the province's health insurance plan.

"People have always been able to augment their care by paying for things that are not yet covered," said David Spencer.

"This government is not one that is in any way supportive of buying your way to the front of the line."

Both opposition parties said McGuinty broke another health-care promise by announcing the private sector would pay for construction of a new hospital in Sault Ste. Marie and to rebuild and expand hospitals in Mississauga and Belleville.

The Liberals condemned the previous Conservative government when it took virtually the same funding approach for so-called P3 hospitals, or public-private partnerships.

"Instead of making public investments in our hospitals, he's privatizing through the back door," Hampton said.

"The reality is the McGuinty government is presiding over piece-by-piece privatization of Ontario's health-care system."

The Liberals insist their funding model is different from the Tories' because the public will eventually own the new hospital.

But Baird said the difference is merely a matter of which bank vault the mortgage paper sits in.

"They cried Chicken Little when the Conservatives brought in the P3 hospitals in Brampton and Ottawa," he said.

"The very policies they vilified are now the law of the land."

Provis is the second private health clinic the Liberals have allowed to open in Ontario after Alegro Health Corp., which also charges patients for its services.