

**Ministry of Health
and Long-Term Care**

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**Ministère de la Santé
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June 27, 2012

The Honourable Leona Aglukkaq, P.C., M.P.
Minister
Health Canada
Brooke Claxton Building, Tunney's Pasture
Ottawa ON K1A 0K9

The Honourable Jason Kenney, P.C., M.P.
Minister
Citizenship and Immigration Canada
Ottawa ON K1A 1L1

Dear Ministers Aglukkaq and Kenney:

I am writing to urge your government to reverse its decision to significantly reduce health coverage for refugee claimants.

Your decision has been the source of mounting concern in Ontario's health care system, particularly among hospitals, community health centres and doctors.

By abdicating your responsibility towards some of the most vulnerable in our society, you have effectively downloaded federal costs onto the provincial health care system.

Your decision revokes funding for medications and other early health care interventions for refugee claimants. The result is that many people in Ontario – including children – will be denied health care until they are in need of emergency treatment.

For example, certain refugee claimants suffering from cardiovascular disease will no longer have federal coverage to see a health practitioner for their condition. In addition to causing needless pain and suffering, failure to treat this condition will exacerbate the future health care needs of someone with this illness.

Even in emergency circumstances, your changes will see certain refugee claimants receiving no health care coverage at all. Should a refugee claimant suffer a heart attack, your government will now refuse any health care coverage. It is grossly irresponsible to withhold funding for this care in such a life-threatening situation.

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Ontario's health care system will not turn away those in need of emergency medical treatment. I continue to hear from health care providers who anticipate an influx of new patients with avoidable health conditions to our hospital emergency rooms and community health centres, especially in urban centres. In effect, this policy change will create a class system for health care in Canada.

While we won't know the full impact for some time, one downtown Toronto hospital estimates \$1.3 million in annual costs to care for refugees – much of which they will no longer be able claim. This cost could rise if they have to contend with unchecked medical conditions. The result will be greater pressure on our health care system for all Ontarians.

Your decision, made without any consultation, will force health care providers to make exceedingly difficult choices for their patients after June 30 – choices which should not have to be made.

Canada was built on the values of inclusion and mutual support. We are stronger as a country when we work together. It is in this spirit that I urge you to live up to your responsibilities and make the right choice to reverse your decision.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Deb Matthews". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Deb Matthews
Minister