

An open letter to Health Minister Leona Aglukkaq re: for-profit paid-donor blood plasma clinics

Dear Minister Aglukkaq,

As health professionals and supporters of a strong public health care system, we are writing to express our deep concern about the potential approval of Canadian Plasma Resources operations, and the lack of significant public policy consideration and consultation on this important issue.

In April, a single consultation in Toronto was held to provide information to a small number of stakeholders and discuss the impacts of paid donor plasma facilities. The results of that discussion were mixed at best concerning the viability of such a significant shift in our blood collection process and only a limited number of groups were invited to participate. This left out a significant number of individuals and organizations who would like the opportunity to be further informed, and to engage in discussion.

Allowing Canadian Plasma Resources to pay donors for plasma is a significant change in practice for our country with respect to blood and plasma collection. The Krever inquiry on the tainted blood scandals specifically called for voluntary donations in Canada to ensure that we have the safest possible blood system, and accommodated deviation from that process only when absolutely necessary (as is the case in Canada's one paid plasma facility in Winnipeg).

Although Health Canada is responsible for evaluating the safety and regulatory aspects of Canadian Plasma Resources, it has not examined the impact of these paid donation facilities on our voluntary blood and plasma donation system.

Health Canada also does not consider the location of these facilities, two of which are located next to a homeless shelter, and a drug treatment clinic respectively. These are high-risk populations for blood and plasma donation. While blood screening techniques post-Krever have improved dramatically, we cannot know what the next blood-borne pathogen might be, and should exercise caution with respect to safety.

What's more, there is no indication that plasma collected at these facilities will be purchased by Canadian Blood Services, nor has Canadian Blood Services said that there is a supply issue that could be remedied through for-profit, paid-donor plasma clinics.

We are asking your government and Health Canada for national, public consultations that create a real public policy review that allows all interested parties to contribute to decision-making on this matter. We remain in support of a public, not-for-profit, voluntary blood and plasma donation system in Canada, and urge you not to proceed with approval to Canadian Plasma Resources before real public policy discussion can occur.

Sincerely,

Dr. Monika Dutt, Canadian Doctors for Medicare
Antonia (Smudge) Swann (widow of James Kreppner)
Michael McBane, Canadian Health Coalition
Linda Silas, Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions
Linda Haslam-Stroud, Ontario Nurses Association
Doris Grinspun, Registered Nurses Association of Ontario
Heather Smith, United Nurses of Alberta
Maude Barlow, Council of Canadians
Dr. Janet Maher, Medical Reform Group
Michael Hurley, Ontario Council of Hospital Unions
Darrell Dular, Older Canadians Network
Mary T. Hynes, Older Women's Network
Jack Pinkus, Alliance of Seniors to Protect Canada's Social Programs
James Hutt, Nova Scotia Citizens' Health Care Network
Rachel Tutte, British Columbia Health Coalition
Sandra Azocar, Friends of Medicare
Natalie Mehra, Ontario Health Coalition
Sue Hotte, Niagara Health Coalition
Shirley Roebuck, Chatham Kent Health Coalition
Ben McDonald, Alternatives North
Paul Moist, Canadian Union of Public Employees
Fred Hahn, CUPE Ontario
Doug MacPherson, Steelworkers Organization of Active Retirees
Pat Kerwin, Congress of Union Retirees of Canada
Sid Ryan, Ontario Federation of Labour
James Clancy, National Union of Public and General Employees
Warren (Smokey) Thomas and Sean Allen, Ontario Public Service Employees Union
Diane Wood, BCFORUM