

CLOSURE STATEMENT OF DR. ADRIAN EDGAR FROM CLINIC 554

Fredericton, New Brunswick. October 10, 2019

It is with a heavy heart that I am here on behalf of Clinic 554 and my entire community of supporters to announce our impending closure. Clinic 554 is first and foremost a family practice, but we have also been the sole abortion provider in New Brunswick's capital city, and the only out-of-hospital site for patients to access abortions in the province. Unlike every other clinic that offers abortions in Canada, and unlike every other healthcare reason a patient comes to see me, the province of New Brunswick unilaterally refuses to allow Medicare to cover the cost of a patient who sees me for an abortion procedure at the Clinic. The province either offloads that fee onto the patient or myself and our loving team of nurses and allied providers. The province does this, knowing it is not fair or financially sustainable to ask healthcare providers to work without wages, nor is it legal to force only patients who have a uterus to pay for their healthcare. As a direct result, it is financially unsustainable for us to keep our doors open, and the clinic has been placed for sale.

What this means for our nearly 3,000 patients, is that within 90 days of the clinic's sale, our team will have nowhere to provide our services. And though I will do everything in my power to renew stable medications and ensure appropriate follow-up for my elderly patients, newborns, and those with chronic health conditions, you, like nearly 20,000 other New Brunswickers will be placed on the provincial waitlist for a family doctor. All because your government could not agree to fund healthcare equitably. This extends to the services we provide for marginalized patients with addictions, LGB and trans patients, patients with HIV, and those with mental health conditions, who by the nature of the stigma they face just existing day to day, require more time at their appointments – time that this government will simply not agree to invest in. I have tried to meet with our Premier, our Health Minister, the Board of Directors for our health authority - Horizon, and the Department of Health, to no avail. I and others have spent countless volunteer hours trying to get our politicians and bureaucrats to care about your health needs. Nearly 35,000 people signed petitions sent to our Health Minister, Mr. Flemming, after this year's flood closed the clinic for a second time, but he has not responded. When the Federal Government instructed him to remove his restrictions on healthcare earlier this year, he didn't even address the issue himself. He sent an assistant to tell you his government was happy with the "status quo", no matter how much it costs New Brunswickers.

These are not new issues that Mr. Flemming's government has had too little time to study. Our community has been fighting with the government of New Brunswick for decades, and although our advocacy is echoed by human rights defenders across the country, our message has been purposefully ignored here at home. What the province of New Brunswick does, by refusing to fund abortion services at our clinic, is a violation of the Canada Health Act. The federal government has the ability to step in to address this illegal penalty against pregnant patients, but it would mean withholding federal health transfers to the province. That would mean forcing New Brunswick to respect a patient's right to abortion by decreasing our healthcare budget. Right now, New Brunswick pays for patients to go to Halifax or Montreal if they are further into their pregnancy than 14 weeks. They could save that money by funding patients to come to Clinic 554. Right now, the province pays for two hospitals in Moncton to provide abortions. They could direct the budget from one of those hospitals to our Clinic in Fredericton. They pay gynaecologists to perform all the abortions in the Province, taking specialists away from the patients on their waitlists – like those of you waiting for a hysterectomy or to have your tubes tied. Allowing patients to access abortions at Clinic 554 would reduce those waitlists for other surgeries and save money for our healthcare system. But, for some reason, New Brunswick would rather gamble with your healthcare dollars and taunt the federal government to intervene to end this disrespect for pregnant patients, than stand up for your reproductive rights. This game of chicken has taken its toll on our patients and their families and is driving family doctors like myself out of a province that is in desperate need of us.

It has never been financially sustainable to provide barrier-free abortions at Clinic 554 without Medicare reimbursement from the province. We remained open all these years through sheer perseverance and due to the charity of individuals

from all across Canada - because the need in our community is so great it touched Canadians everywhere. I thought I would be the family doctor for my patients until I or they died. But I didn't predict our government would continue to act illegally to withhold healthcare from my patients. I honestly thought they must not have known what they were doing. But they do know. They know, that if Clinic 554 is forced to close, and nothing changes, there are only three hospitals where people can get abortions in New Brunswick, and none in our capital city. Our nearest hospital to access an abortion is more than 150km away. The cost and burden and delay of not having these services available locally in the community will continue to be borne by patients and their loved ones. And for what?

Clinic 554 has been a safe space for many people in the community who have faced marginalization and violence. We know that this closure will have a major impact on the availability of gender and reproductive health services for the people of Fredericton, and indeed the entire province of New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island - where many of our trans patients live. We feel a tremendous amount of fear for our patients and the underserved communities we care for, and we deeply regret having to ask our health and social justice communities to rally together again to fill the gap that will be left in the clinic's absence.

In my opinion, this is a problem for Canada, not only New Brunswick.

We all share the same internationally recognized rights to health, and yet, New Brunswickers rights are being violated, leaving the federal government with no choice but to step in to defend them.

I am sad, that during this federal election, our leaders have focused on whether or not they'll 'reopen the debate' on abortion, rather than the real crisis at hand: access.

We're looking to the leaders of all federal parties to talk about what is really at stake: the fact that too many people across the country have to travel hundreds, sometimes thousands of kilometres to access abortion in Canada. That protesters and crisis pregnancy centres are allowed to actively deter people from accessible healthcare, and bubble zones are not nationally available to protect healthcare workers and patients. That the majority of healthcare providers and health institutions in this country refuse to provide abortion care. That patients can't afford to, and should not be made to, pay out-of-pocket for healthcare in a country that is supposed to defend universal access. This. Is. Unacceptable.

Come October 22nd, we expect our next Prime Minister to take responsibility for protecting and ensuring universal healthcare is available to all Canadians, specifically abortion services in New Brunswick. We ask each candidate to make a commitment NOW to ensuring that all Canadians have access to the health services to which they are entitled.

We expect and demand that the next federal government take swift, decisive action on October 22nd to hold New Brunswick accountable under the Canada Health Act by immediately withholding health transfers to the province until they fund abortion care outside of hospitals properly. We call on our Premiere, Blaine Higgs, to take action before October 22nd to prevent the Prime Minister from having to do so for him.

Thank you.

Dr. Adrian Eoin Edgar

Medical Director, Clinic 554

Fredericton, New Brunswick