



# Newsletter

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## **Throne speech signals more private health care**

*Analysis: Klein-style reforms will cost more and drain skilled health care workers from publicly-operated hospitals*

The BC government laid out its objectives for the new session of the legislature Tuesday including a plan for a province-wide “conversation” on fundamental changes to public health care.

But it appears that the BC government may have already made up its mind on the direction it will take.

In a speech laden with references to transformative change, the government broadly hinted that it will expand private surgeries and consider the introduction of private health insurance.

The government may have tipped its hand yesterday when the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority issued a request for proposals to contract out the delivery of 3,200 surgical procedures to private clinics over the next three years.

The throne speech plan sounds like the so-called “Third Way” floated by the Ralph Klein government in Alberta last year. That scheme would allow a parallel private system and private insurers to operate alongside Alberta’s public health system.

Medicare advocates say such a system will result in better access to services for those who can afford to pay for private insurance.

And several studies have concluded that a parallel private system would not reduce waiting times.

The BC government also said today that it would entrench the five principles of the Canada Health Act in provincial legislation – even though those principles are already enshrined in the preamble to the provincial Medicare Protection Act – and add a sixth principle of sustainability.

But it’s not at all clear that the BC government is prepared to take steps to make sure the province’s burgeoning private clinic industry are complying with these principles.

In 2003, under intense pressure from the private health care lobby, the BC government failed to enact legislation that it had introduced and passed in the legislature that contained some of the tools it needed to ensure compliance.

More private clinics will also drain skilled technicians, nursing staff and doctors from public hospitals – compounding a retention and recruitment crisis that’s already putting health care at risk.

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