



# *Alternatives North*

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## **Don't Tax Sickness or Erode Universality—Alternatives North Responds to GNWT Health Care Benefits Consultations**

Alternatives North is calling on the GNWT to ensure access to supplemental health care benefits is universal and paid for through the tax system, not by co-payments or premiums schemes that create a tax on sickness and disability.

The comments are contained in social justice coalition's submission to the “*Conversation with Northerners*” consultations being carried out by GNWT in preparation for changes to the Supplemental Health Benefits.

While supporting the need for all northerners to have access, and for the simplification of programs and registration, Alternatives North emphasizes that such health care benefits are among the most important and valued services paid for by taxpayers. The submission says that whether people use the services or not, society must share in the costs and benefits, and that costs of additional coverage should be taken out of progressive taxation and not through co-payments.

“What we know from national and international experience is that when programs are not universal, they lose overall support and are increasingly vulnerable to continued erosion,” says Alternatives North spokesperson Ben McDonald.

The five-page submission challenges many of the assumptions motivating the change proposals and notes that a convincing rationale for them is lacking. While the GNWT notes there are individuals and families without access to GNWT or employment insurance-based programs, no attempt is made to estimate their numbers. Although the GNWT says the costs of the benefits programs are unsustainable, it offers no projection of what resources government will have in future, or what tax changes could improve revenues. No options are proposed to deal with rising drug costs though drug based claims seem to be one of the biggest concerns.

Alternatives North is requesting that the September 2010 implementation date announced for changes be postponed until deficiencies in information are rectified and more options are presented for public comment.

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