

BRIEFING NOTE: International Student Health Fee

Prepared by Sanctuary Health, January 20 2022; Updated June 1 2022

Purpose

To share an additional issue with the International Student Health Fee that were not addressed in existing submissions about the Fee: the definition of “international student” used in implementing the policy arbitrarily targets the children of some of the most marginalized families in our province.

Issue

In March 2019, the B.C. government introduced legislation to eliminate Medical Services Plan (“MSP”) premiums.¹ They stated that it would result in administrative savings over \$50 million annually.² The Minister of Health said “the people of our province should be able to access British Columbia’s world-class health care system without having to worry whether or not they can pay their MSP premium.”³

In August 2019, the B.C. government introduced the International Student Health Fee (“the Fee”), which requires the same administrative burdens and increased the financial burden on the families of international students compared to the previous MSP premiums.⁴ This new Fee also reversed the previous government’s decision to eliminate MSP premiums for children by re-introducing the Fee for K-12 students with study permits.⁵ Student unions across the province wrote to the government explaining the injustice of the Fee and recommending its elimination.^{6,7}

The Fee is implemented through Ministerial Order No M483, which defines “international student” according to the Medical and Health Care Services Regulation (“the Regulation”).⁸ The previous purpose of this definition (anybody with a valid study permit of 6 or more months) was to be broad enough to stop students from being excluded from health care.⁹ Now, the definition is being used to charge a Fee as broadly as possible: the Fee is charged regardless of whether the person holding a study permit would be eligible for the Medical Services Plan without a study permit.

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada recognizes that a minor whose parent has a study or work permit does not need a study permit to study in Canada, and that “the child may have either a visitor record or a study permit when entering Canada.”¹⁰ In these situations, minors with visitor records and minors with study permits are both eligible for MSP under paragraph 2(j) of the Regulation.¹¹ This leads to the absurd situation where an arbitrary choice between issuing minors a study permit or a visitor record, a decision which would otherwise have no impact on

the family, costs families \$900 per child per year. The Ministry of Health includes minors with visitor records as dependents in their family’s account. Strangely, the Ministry of Health refuses to add minors with study permits to their family’s accounts, billing them as individuals instead.

When the Fee was introduced, the government tried to justify it by saying that “Ontario and Quebec receive the largest number of international students, and do not provide international students with coverage under their public health-care plans.”¹² However, BC is charging the Fee to children who are eligible for public health care plans in Ontario and Quebec. Below are examples of some of these situations:

	BC’s Ministry of Education considers “ordinarily resident” ¹³	Receives OHIP in Ontario ¹⁴	Receives RAM-Q in Quebec ¹⁵	Receives MSP in BC without having to pay the Fee
Minor with a visitor record whose parent is on a work permit longer than six months	✓	✓	✓	✓
Minor with a study permit whose parent is on a work permit longer than six months	✓	✓	✓	✗
Protected person (minor or adult)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Protected person (minor or adult) who has a study permit	✓	✓	✓	✗

Conclusion

The Ministry of Health is trying to limit administrative burdens by using the Regulation’s broad definition of international student. It prioritizes this simplicity by imposing debt onto migrant families who are already facing discrimination, exploitation and exclusion.¹⁶ As the Graduate Student Society at SFU clearly stated: “If the administrative burden of MSP was too inconvenient to keep around, the same should be true of the new health fee.”¹⁷ The only answer is to eliminate the International Student Health Fee.

Recommendation

- *Eliminate the International Student Health Fee.*
- *Forgive debt for people who have been unable to pay the International Student Health Fee.*
- *Reimburse dependent children who have been charged the International Student Health Fee.*

REFERENCES

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- 3** Ibid.
- 4** McDonald, Matt, The Graduate Student Society at Simon Fraser University, Changes to BC International Student Health Fees: What are the Issues?, January 2020.
- 5** Ministry of Health, International students continue to contribute to B.C. health care as MSP premiums eliminated, August 1 2019 <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2019HLTH0114-001555>
- 6** Alliance of BC Students, Re: International Student Contributions to Medical Services Plan, January 24 2019 <https://bcstudents.ca/news/2020/1/24/open-letter-on-international-student-msp-contributions>
- 7** McDonald, Matt, op. cit.
- 8** Order of the Minister of Finance, Ministerial Order No M483 https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/mo/hmo/mo483_2019
- 9** Medical and Health Care Services Regulation https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/426_97#section2
- 10** Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, Find out if your child needs a study permit, Date modified: 2018-04-20 <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/study-canada/study-permit/prepare/minor-children/need-permit.html>
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- 17** McDonald, Matt, op. cit.