

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Health Justice Program warns new Interim Federal Health Program co-payments will put essential care out of reach for refugees and undermine access to justice

Toronto, ON - January 28, 2026 - The Health Justice Program (HJP) is joining other health care providers, lawyers, and community organizations in raising urgent concerns about Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada's (IRCC) [announcement](#) that **co-payments will be introduced for supplemental benefits under the Interim Federal Health Program (IFHP) effective May 1, 2026.**

Under the change, individuals and families covered through IFHP will be required to pay 30% of the cost of eligible supplemental health products and services, including mental health counselling, dental and vision care, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech language therapy, and assistive devices, as well as \$4 per medication.

The announced changes to IFHP will not affect basic physician and hospital services, which remain covered without co-payments.

HJP is concerned that IFHP co-payments will become insurmountable barriers for many refugee claimants and newly arrived refugees, who often arrive with little or no financial means and are navigating trauma, displacement, precarious housing, and food insecurity.

"This change will predictably block access to vital health care - especially mental health supports - and it will ripple into the legal system," said Jennifer Stone, Director, Health Justice Program. "When someone can't access counselling, medications, or assessments because they can't cover a co-pay, their health suffers and so does their ability to meaningfully participate in immigration and refugee processes, secure stable housing, or pursue safety and family reunification."

IFHP changes pose a barrier to healing and to justice

Refugee and immigration legal processes frequently require people to recount painful experiences and produce documentation to substantiate the impacts of persecution, violence, torture, or other trauma. In HJP's work, access to mental health counselling and psychological assessments can be crucial for:

- stabilization and trauma support during ongoing legal proceedings;
- obtaining medical/psychological evidence relevant to claims, humanitarian applications, or other legal pathways; and

- supporting clients' capacity to instruct counsel and participate in hearings and interviews.

“We regularly refer clients to psychotherapy so they can process the trauma that legal processes require them to disclose,” added Stone. “Co-pays will shut that door for many at exactly the moment supports are most needed.”

Downstream costs, preventable crises

HJP is also concerned, based on existing evidence, that the policy may be counterproductive and more expensive over time, increasing avoidable crises and shifting costs to emergency departments when people delay or forgo needed care.

The supplemental services now subject to co-pay include supports that prevent disease progression and destabilization. Medications help prevent the serious complications of chronic diseases such as diabetes or asthma; dental care reduces dental pain and infection; vision care allows for improved participation in school and work; and physiotherapy and assistive devices support mobility and independence.

HJP calls on the federal government to act

The Health Justice Program calls on the federal government to immediately reverse the decision to introduce co-payments for IFHP supplemental benefits and medication coverage.

“Refugees shouldn’t have to choose between a prescription and groceries, or between counselling and rent,” said Stone. “Canada can manage program costs without erecting barriers that deepen inequities and worsen health.”

About the Health Justice Program

The Health Justice Program (HJP) is a medical-legal partnership that works to improve access to justice and advance the social determinants of health by integrating legal support with health and community services. HJP supports community members facing intersecting health and legal challenges, including those related to immigration status, income, housing, and access to essential services.

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