

FACT SHEET: Public Services Building better communities

Canadians depend on the quality of life that comes from public services. Across Canada, CUPE members deliver and use the services that keep our communities safe and healthy. We work in hospitals, schools and universities; on the ground with community-based services and in the skies as flight attendants. We provide safe water, clean streets, reliable emergency services. We are the glue that holds communities together. We help make the world a better place.

But negotiations underway at the World Trade Organization (WTO) seriously threaten our communities – and quality of life.

Governments and corporations see Canada's public services as a missed business opportunity. To cash in, they are using the WTO's General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) to lock in corporate profits over community rights.

In fact, the Canadian government is leading the way to define every possible public service as a moneymaking opportunity that's governed by trade rules, not public need.

The vast majority of Canadians want to keep public services off the table in the GATS or any other trade deal. But the Canadian government is using the GATS to divert public spending to private gain, and to push privatization of vital public services.

If governments and corporate lobbyists at the unelected WTO get their way, health care, education, social services, municipal services, utilities and many other public services will be run as for-profit businesses. Access to services as well as accountability and quality will decline. Good jobs will disappear and the environment will suffer.

Our Jobs, Our Communities, Our Future

The WTO wants to:

- Set new rules for trade and investment in all services – education, health, social services, libraries, recreation and culture, architecture and engineering, sewer and water, construction, retail and many other sectors that fall partly or wholly under local government control.
- Guarantee foreign corporations the right to turn our hospitals, schools, social service agencies and water services into commercial ventures.
- Deny governments the right to favour local or not-for-profit service providers over foreign suppliers.
- Severely limit the ability of governments to maintain or create standards to protect the environment, public health, consumers and other public interests.
- Control measures taken by governments and their agencies at all levels – national, provincial and local. Even a municipal zoning decision could be subject to trade sanctions, if it's seen to be interfering with a company's profits.
- Lock in future governments and limit their ability to regulate, change or end this market-driven, anti-union trade regime.

No to the WTO

The GATS negotiations will open up public services to an all-out corporate takeover. This new, wide-ranging trade deal has far-reaching rules that will:

- Introduce private, for-profit hospitals run on a pay-per-use basis and staffed cheaply by less qualified, contracted-out or "imported" non-unionized workers.
- Force Canadian public schools to compete with for-profit educational institutions for scarce resources.
- Divert public tax dollars into foreign-owned for-profit corporations instead of publicly owned and operated services.
- Prevent governments at all levels from favouring Canadian, local, or not-for-profit municipal services and utilities over foreign for-profit corporations.

Public services are a right!