

The Truth About Canada's Healthcare Wait Times

Featuring

Dr. Bernard Ho

Vice-Chair, [Canadian Doctors for Medicare](#)



This time on Code WACK!

Today we're taking **an inside look at Canada's public health insurance system** known as Medicare. **What are the biggest misconceptions Americans have about it? *What works, what doesn't, and why?*** And what happens when a public system starts drifting toward privatization?

This is part one of our conversation with **Dr. Bernard Ho**, an emergency physician in Toronto and Vice-Chair of **Canadian Doctors for Medicare**, a national evidence-based organization working to strengthen Canada's publicly funded healthcare system. He is a lecturer at the University of Toronto, where he also earned his M.D. Bernard is currently completing his Masters of Public Administration at the Harvard Kennedy School.

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We hear all the time in the U.S. that wait times in Canada are terrible. When you hear that, what do you think Americans are getting wrong?

Ho: I think that's usually a big oversimplification. I think wait times in Canada really depend on what you're waiting for. So if something is an emergency or is extremely urgent, like a heart attack or a stroke, or you've gotten to a big accident, then you're treated immediately and that's not where the delays or the wait times are.

Where I think Canada does struggle is with non-urgent care. So for example, the average wait time from referral from a doctor to treatment for what we call elective procedures is around 27 to 30 weeks. So that's quite long and obviously very frustrating for Canadian patients.

[But] even in the US for example, the average wait time to get a new doctor's appointment in major cities can be three to four weeks, and about a quarter of Americans report delaying or skipping care because of the cost of healthcare.

I think in Canada wait times are ... based on medical priority, whereas in the US it's ... tied to affordability of care.

Is Canada starting to move toward a more privatized system?

Ho: We are seeing more and more private surgical clinics pop up in Canada where patients can pay to get faster access to these procedures. And I think these procedures cost anywhere from \$20,000 to \$40,000 ...

The issue there is that there's a lot of scientific evidence to show that when we do this, when we allow this type of what we call private delivery of care, kind of like in the US, it creates this two-tiered healthcare system that actually worsens wait times for the public system, worsens wait times for everyone else other than the person who's paying to jump the queue.

And it doesn't actually improve the issues that we're trying to tackle. And so the better solution is actually to put more funding, more money into our public system so that we have more doctors, more nurses, more anesthetists and more offering room time to get these procedures done quicker.

What's the biggest misconception Americans have about the Canadian healthcare system?

Ho: I would say that I think the biggest misconception from when I talk to other Americans is that because of all of these wait times, Canada's system is either a disaster or that it eliminates all problems because of our "universal coverage."

And I think the reality is that Canada is somewhere in the middle. We provide universal access and strong financial protection ... high quality care with low or no cost, and the trade off is, there are the wait times.

Whereas I think the US has chosen high quality care with low wait times with the trade off being the cost to the patient.

Helpful Links

[Canadian Doctors for Medicare](#)

[What Are the Pros and Cons of the Canadian Healthcare System in 2026?](#), *Caring Support*

[How Privatization Infects the Canadian Health Care System](#), *CUNY School of Labor And Urban Studies*

Episode Transcript

Read the [episode transcript](#).

Guest Biography - Dr. Bernard Ho

Bernard Ho is an emergency physician in Toronto and Vice-Chair of Canadian Doctors for Medicare, a national evidence-based organization that works to strengthen Canada's publicly-funded health care system.

He is a lecturer at the University of Toronto, where he also earned his M.D. Bernard is currently completing his Masters of Public Administration at the Harvard Kennedy School.

His clinical work emphasizes how socioeconomic factors such as income level, race, and education directly influence health and well-being. He is interested in the role of public administration as a tool to protect and optimize the health of all individuals, particularly those made structurally vulnerable.

He has received numerous awards for his advocacy work, including the Queen's Platinum Jubilee Award.

Host Biography: Brenda Gazzar

Brenda Gazzar, the host and co-producer of **Code WACK!**, has produced over 300 weekly podcast episodes topping 400,000 downloads. A skilled interviewer and storyteller, Brenda brings nuance, curiosity, and clarity to every conversation.

Brenda has worked as a multilingual and award-winning reporter with more than two decades experience in California and the Middle East.

Her work has been published by Reuters, Ms. Magazine, USA Today, Los Angeles Daily News, the Orange County Register, The Wrap, The Jerusalem Post, Cairo Times and numerous other publications. She speaks Spanish, Hebrew, and moderate Arabic and is the recipient of national, state and regional awards.

Brenda also enjoys being a life coach, helping people align with their purpose so they feel fulfilled while achieving their boldest dreams.

Brenda's work is grounded in a belief that systemic change and personal growth go hand in hand — and she's here for both.

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