

**TRANSLATED VERSION OF LETTER SENT BY YVES-FRANÇOIS BLANCHET ON
AUGUST 19, 2021**

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Mr. Brian Pallister
Premier of Manitoba and Chair of the Council of the Federation
Premier's Office/Executive Council
Legislative Building
Winnipeg, Manitoba R3C 0V8

Dear Premier,

I would like to thank you for your letter, in which you asked me to support the request made by the Government of Québec and the other provincial governments in calling for an immediate and unconditional increase in health care funding via the Canada Health Transfer (CHT) with a view to ensuring that the CHT covers 35% of provincial and territorial health care costs.

My response is unequivocal: yes, you can count on the support of the Bloc Québécois (BQ).

We wholeheartedly support the conclusions of your study, which demonstrates that federal funding covering 35% of health care costs is the only way to ensure the provinces' long-term financial viability and to meet growing health care needs, especially considering our aging population. For the BQ, the viability of the only government representing the Québec nation is an issue of near existential importance. Indeed, it is one of our top priorities.

Moreover, we do not plan to support the next Throne Speech unless it includes an announcement confirming an immediate, substantial and long-term increase in the CHT, and unless a plan is laid out to reach the 35% target you set, while also maintaining that target over the long term. In the event that a minority government is elected and the BQ holds the balance of power, I can assure you that the CHT will increase substantially.

Your letter brings me particular pleasure when it emphasizes the unconditional nature of these transfers. All too often, Québec has come to rely on the provinces' support in its financial relations with Ottawa, but has found itself quite alone when the time comes to defend its areas of jurisdiction and its autonomy.

In theory, Canada is supposed to be a federation, and the federal and provincial governments are supposed to be equally sovereign, although not in the same areas of jurisdiction. I am sure that you will agree with me that this vision of Canada is quite far removed from reality and that Québec has stood alone for too long in resisting a trend towards centralization that continues to this day, especially considering English Canada's repatriation of its constitution without Québec or its agreement, despite Québec's opposition, to give the federal government a lead role in defining social policy within the social union project.

In your letter, I would like to have seen the premise of a change in the power-based relationships within the Canadian federation, leaving behind the current model in which Ottawa uses its financial flexibility to impose its choices in areas in which it has no constitutional competence, no particular expertise, or no service delivery responsibility.

Indeed, regarding health care, you have surely noted that Ottawa tends to forget about the CHT whenever Québec and the other provinces have the necessary flexibility to allocate funding in line with public health care needs. Instead, Ottawa focuses on targeted and conditional transfers based on federal politicians' priorities.

In this respect, the most recent budget speaks volumes: an array of standards, plans, strategies and other types of interference were announced, touching on long-term care facilities, mental health, homecare services, women's health, reproductive health, and so on. Little by little, the federal government is seeking to wrest the power to determine the regulatory framework in all areas, relegating Québec and the other provinces to the status of sub-contractors. This is utterly unacceptable to the BQ. Unfortunately, however, we are all too often the only ones to oppose such interference in the House of Commons.

I am very pleased to note that the Council of the Federation is joining the fray. I look forward to reading the responses of the other party leaders to your letter and to seeing whether they will heed your call for autonomy.

For my part, I can assure you of my support and that of the BQ.

Yours truly,

Yves-François Blanchet
Leader of the Bloc Québécois