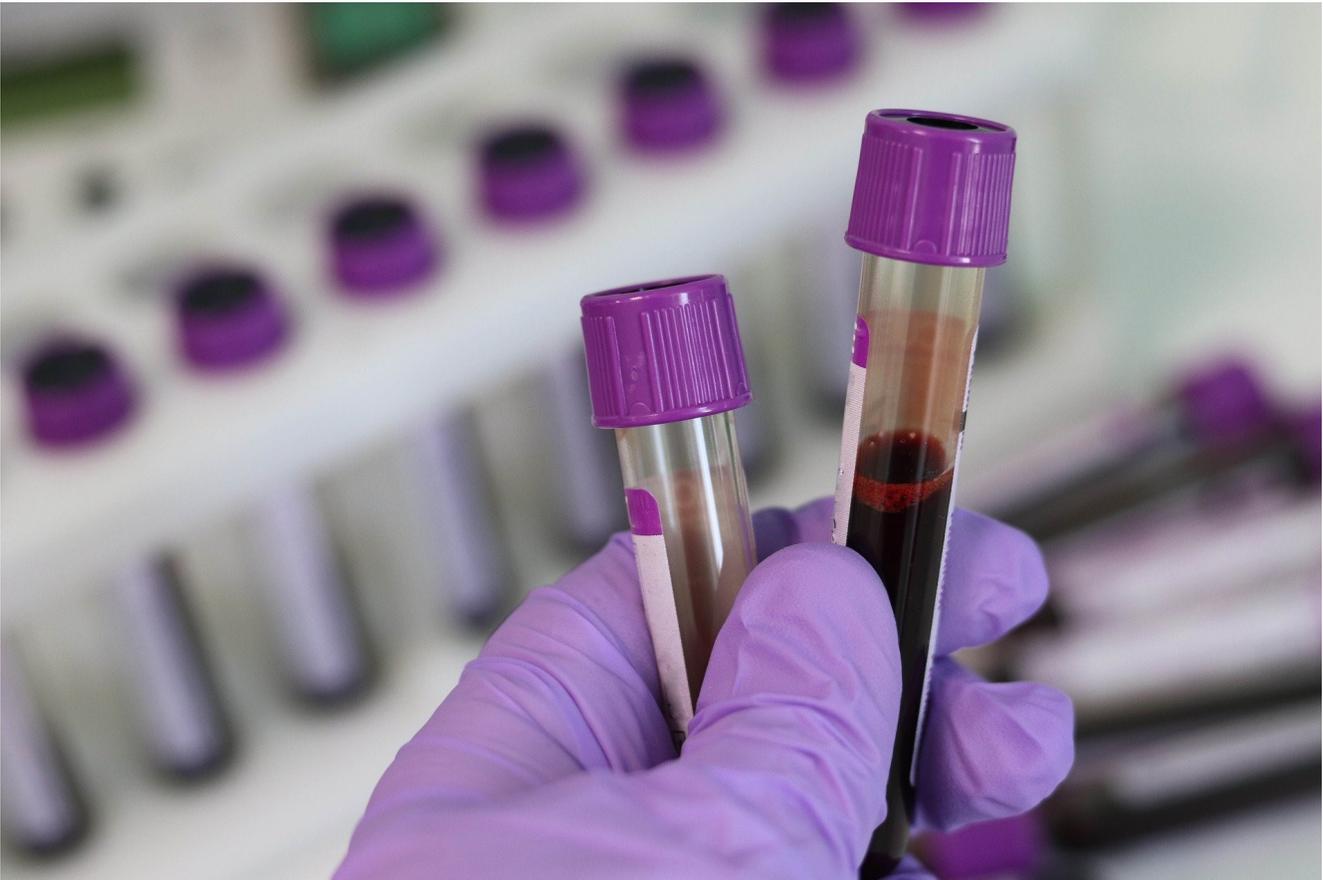


THE LINDSAY ADVOCATE
KAWARTHA LAKES' FINEST MAGAZINE

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LifeLabs \$30 home visit fee an equity issue, says area residents and local health coalition

Published on January 27, 2021 — in Health/Social Issues — by Roderick Bennis

Laura LeMiere's nana is 90-years-old and has limited mobility. When she r

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blood work to confirm a health concern, her options were clear – pay to have someone from LifeLabs come to her home, or face line-ups at the lab on Angeline Street in Lindsay.

Online booking is not an option for LeMiere’s nana without a computer or internet and booking an appointment by phone is often difficult due to wait times.



LAURA LEMIERE SAYS THERE’S NO PLACE FOR PRIVATE INTERESTS IN HEALTHCARE.

Fortunately, the \$30 is not a concern for LeMiere’s relative but the principle of it got

her thinking.

“Since March 2020, we unfortunately have lost many seniors due to COVID-19 and have continuously been told we must all do our part by staying home to save lives — yet these same vulnerable people are being forced to either put themselves at risk by going out or, pay if they want to be provided basic medical care,” she tells the *Advocate*.

Many seniors have limited income, LeMiere notes, “and should not be concerned with whether or not they can afford something as simple as blood work.”

She wonders how many health concerns are being overlooked for fear of possible fees.

Sharon Robbins, a Lindsay resident who has her 96-year-old mother living with her, says she believes this is an equity issue on two fronts.

“There is no way I would be comfortable having my mother at LifeLabs for any tests. We are asked to stay at home to stop the spread of the virus and the elderly are the most at risk,” she says.

Robbins says while her family can afford a home visit from LifeLabs if needed, “there are many families that might struggle to find that extra money.”

That’s why she thinks the province should be paying the bill.

“Picking up the tab for house calls for the elderly and at-risk people is an inexpensive way for the province to protect and care for

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our seniors.”

LeMiere agrees. “I believe that for the duration of the pandemic, these fees should be compensated by the government for seniors and other vulnerable people.”

Bonnie Kennedy, co-chair of the Kawartha Lakes Health Coalition, says the need for a “truly universal health system” is very much highlighted with issues like this.

“The (health) needs of everyone should be addressed without profit motive and the exploitation of the vulnerable populations must end,” Kennedy says.

She says privatization leads to discrimination and in a global health crisis, no one should have to bear the costs when it comes to protecting themselves.

“The privatization of labs in the 1990s and 2000s was initiated not on studies conducted, but with the overall public policy of austerity and privatization that has marked Canada and much of the world over the last several decades,” Kennedy says.

Hospital laboratories were able to complete tests at a cheaper rate, she says, rather than using the for-profit model. “These savings that occurred would have allowed for further investments in equipment and facilities to handle the expanded capacity at hospitals.”

The profit motive, where people are seen as customers and not patients, must be removed from our healthcare system, Kennedy says.

Realizing the “improbability of this reversal in policy,” Kennedy points out there are go-arounds to avoid the profit-driven model of LifeLabs.

She says if the person is an active client of the Local Health Integration Network (LHIN), is bed bound or housebound, they could be considered on a case-by-case basis to have the cost of in-home blood taking covered.

Another option is to contact one’s family doctor to make a referral by sending the requisition to the LHIN if unable to get to the laboratory. This process would take a few days.

Roy Saad, manager of communications for **LifeLabs**, says it “has always provided mobile lab services to homebound customers at the request of their healthcare provider for a fee of \$30.”

“Ensuring access to health services is critical to LifeLabs,” says Saad, and points out the same thing Kennedy noted – that tests can be ordered by a physician to avoid a fee.

The communications manager says since the start of the pandemic there have been “improved wait times for our customers.”

“We continue to make adjustments to our collection sites to serve customers safely during the winter months, including leasing additional space indoors to accommodate physical distancing requirements for customers visiting our collection site.”

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Saad says the most recent provincial shut-down has created some “staffing challenges” with some employees needing to stay home for child care accommodations.

believe there is room for privatization.”

However, she says we already see so many private interests in healthcare that “it would take a drastic change to fix our current system.”

As for LeMiere, she says if we are to keep public healthcare truly public, “I do not

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