

## 10 health stories that mattered: May 16–22

- Unions representing [federal scientists protested censorship and partisan interference](#) under the current government. The Public Service Alliance of Canada, Canadian Association of Professional Employees and Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada expected hundreds at the Ottawa demonstration to protest the muzzling of Canada's publicly funded scientists, but said that participation was sparse because of a "climate of fear."
- Federal Health Minister Rona Ambrose announced [\\$13 million in new funding to increase the number of pharmacy inspections](#) Health Canada carries out each year with the aim of curbing the illegal sale of prescription drugs. The new funds will be used to conduct 1000 extra inspections in the next four years, and 180 extra annual inspections thereafter.
- Alberta's latest [flu season was the deadliest on record](#) since the province started keeping reliable statistics in the mid-1990s. According to Alberta Health Services, there were 103 flu-related deaths last season — more than double the number from the year before — and some 1800 people were admitted to hospital. Health officials attributed the high number of deaths to the mutation of the H3N2 virus, which reduced the effectiveness of this year's flu shot.
- First Nations children and those whose families receive government support are [five times more likely to visit the hospital for self-harm](#) than other children, revealed an Alberta study published in the *Canadian Journal of Emergency Medicine*. First Nations children also face longer waits for follow-up care for self-harm, waiting a median 39 days compared with 16 days for children whose families receive no government assistance.
- A [\\$102-million lawsuit between eHealth Ontario and CGI Information Systems](#) will be settled out of court by an arbitrator, the *Toronto Star* reported. The electronic health records agency contracted CGI to build a \$46-million diabetes patient registry, but terminated the contract with no payment in 2012 claiming the registry wasn't delivered on time. CGI alleges that eHealth was to blame for the delays.
- [Clients of a Quebec City rehab centre protested 21 recent layoffs](#) at the facility under Health Minister Gaétan Barrette's austerity program. L'Institut de réadaptation en déficience physique de Quebec has seen its budget cut by \$3 million, and the resulting layoffs included staff who trained clients to use bathroom facilities. Now, clients say they must wear diapers, among other shortfalls in care.
- Health Quality Ontario reported wide discrepancies in the [use of anti-psychotic drugs in nursing homes](#). At some homes, more than 60% of residents are prescribed these controversial medications; other homes prescribed none. Although antipsychotic drugs can help control severe aggression, agitation and hallucinations caused by dementia, they can also increase the risk of falls, stroke, pneumonia and death among elderly patients.
- [Manitoba Health said it won't revive a pediatric cardiac surgery program](#) that it shut down in the late 1990s following a \$2.4-million inquest into the deaths of 12 babies, several of which were preventable deaths. About 150 Manitoba children need heart surgery each year, but health officials say the number would have to be closer to 250 or 300 to merit a provincial program.
- Ontario will rethink its process for clearing a [backlog of 60 000 medical reviews](#) for people on disability welfare. The current rejection rate is so high that more than half of legal clinic cases now involve Ontario Disability Support Program appeals. The majority of these appeals for benefits are ultimately approved.
- A Saskatchewan student filed a benchmark human rights case over his high school's ban on medical marijuana. Michael Wileniec takes the drug to manage pain from hereditary multiple exostoses — a disease in which tumours grow on his bones and in his joints. Although Nutana Collegiate in Saskatoon initially allowed Wileniec to smoke the drug off grounds, the school has since forbidden him to attend classes while under the influence. — Lauren Vogel, *CMAJ*

*CMAJ* 2015. DOI:10.1503/cmaj.109-5075