

It's time to leverage public-private partnerships

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This province of ours, and in fact the entire country, could learn a lesson or two from King Township.

This small municipality may be rich in citizenry, but its municipal coffers are meager, subsisting on the property taxes of our small population. Yes, taxes here are high, but every penny is spent frugally by our township.

King has to make do with only a small portion of every tax dollar it collects, to fund its hard and soft services across this large stretch of land.

Thinking outside of the box has become the norm locally. It has to. In order to stretch those tax dollars, innovative measures need to be found and utilized.

King has secured a private user for the former Schomberg arena lands, while retaining ownership. The plan will generate revenue and the Township doesn't have to spend money or commit to any financial burden. Put simply, they maintain control without any of the costs.

The Township purchased the former Holy Name School on King Road just west of King City. They paid a bit over \$3 million and the property's value has likely increased already.

One option is to relocate the Township offices there, after renovations are complete. But they also plan to offer up valuable space in the building to community partners and other occupants, some of whom will pay rent. This is a win-win situation.

The Township works with local private schools, school boards and churches for joint use of sports facilities.

A developer built a sales office attached to the King Township Museum, adding value to the building and property. Once they vacate, the Township will enjoy a beautiful, modern facility.

The Trisan Centre is a prime example of how government funding, combined with corporate dollars, resulted in a state-of-the-art facility that few municipalities have.

There are countless examples of how public-private partnerships can be beneficial and cost-effective.

It's time that citizens stop looking to government ??at all levels ??as being our sole babysitters, service providers and cradle-to-grave caregivers. We simply can't afford it. And by we, I mean taxpayers. There is a limit to just what we can afford to pay out in taxes.

Our health care system is a prime example.

While lauded the world over for our universal health care system, it's not all that it's cracked up to be.

Long wait times, cuts to OHIP-covered medications are taking their toll. Private medical plans are cutting back, too.

By comparison, the German health care system embraces the private sector, costs less and has shorter wait times than our system.

A study is part of a series of Fraser Institute studies examining health care policies in other countries that share Canada's noble goal of access to care regardless of ability to pay. This recent one spotlights the German health care system and offers valuable insights for the health care debate in Canada.

Canadian policy makers could learn a lot from the German health care system and its reliance on the private sector, because despite spending substantially less on health care, Germans enjoy shorter wait times for emergency care, primary care, specialist appointments and elective surgery than Canadians, said Nadeem Esmail, Fraser Institute senior fellow and author of Health Care

Lessons from Germany.

In 2009, as an age-adjusted percentage of GDP, Germany's total health care expenditures (9.8 per cent) were 22 per cent lower than Canada's (12.5 per cent).

Among developed countries with universal health care, Germany's total health care expenditures were one per cent below the all-country average. By comparison, Canada's health care expenditures, the highest among developed countries with universal health care, were 26 per cent higher than the all-country average.

The study finds that the Canadian health care system would greatly improve if provinces allowed more private competition in the financing and delivery of health care, like in Germany and other countries with high-performing universal systems.

Unlike Canada's tax-funded government monopoly, the German health insurance system provides universal coverage through two insurance premium-funded systems: a statutory social health insurance system for all Germans and a second optional system for higher-income and self-employed Germans (as well as civil servants). In both systems, private insurers compete for subscribers while private providers (i.e. hospitals) compete for patients. And governments in Germany, while involved in funding, regulation and oversight, play little role in the direct delivery of health care.

Why hasn't our province sought out corporate partners to help absorb these escalating costs?

We have it to an extent when it comes to building new hospitals. Fortunately there are some private donations that help create new hospital wings and pay for much-needed equipment.

I don't think patients care whose name is on a piece of equipment or what brand of medication they receive, as long as they get the care they need. Heck, if I were sick and needed life-saving medication, I'd agree to have the drug manufacturer's name tattooed on my forehead!

Large companies lobby the government constantly to get those lucrative contracts. From everything from limos for politicians to military vehicles, to the pens and computer ink used by Queen's Park and Parliament Hill, there are ample corporate clients to negotiate with.

Some corporate giants would promise the moon to get a piece of the action. Why not let them have a shot, and direct much-needed funds where they're needed most?

Maybe this is a socialist viewpoint.

The bottom line is we can't afford the current system and we can't tolerate any more cuts to services.

So, it only makes sense to seek out and leverage relationships with those with deep pockets, regardless of their interests.

Some would say that's like selling your soul to the devil. Hey, if it meant keeping mine inside my body a bit longer, so be it!