

The Legacy of Tommy Douglas

by Laurie Simons and Terry Sterrenberg, the producers of [The Healthcare Movie](#)



Tommy Douglas is remembered as the driving force behind universal healthcare in Canada, but what makes his story especially powerful is that he began as one ordinary person who believed that things did not have to stay the way they were.

As a young man growing up during the Great Depression, Douglas saw families suffer because they could not afford medical care. He watched people delay treatment, lose their savings, and live with fear simply because getting sick could mean financial disaster. Rather than accepting this as inevitable, he began asking a different question: What kind of society do we want to create together?

As Premier of Saskatchewan, Douglas helped turn that question into action. In 1947, his government introduced North America's first publicly funded hospital insurance plan, despite fierce criticism from powerful interests who insisted it could never work. Later, Saskatchewan became the first place in Canada to provide universal medical coverage for all residents. The transition was difficult, including a bitter doctors' strike, but Douglas and his supporters stayed focused on a larger vision: that healthcare should be based on human need, not personal wealth.

What began in one prairie province eventually transformed an entire country. Canada's national healthcare system grew directly out of the Saskatchewan model, proving that bold social change can begin locally, with small groups of determined people willing to imagine something better. Tommy Douglas's legacy is not only about healthcare. It is a reminder that systems created by people can also be changed by people — and that ***when citizens organize around a shared vision of dignity and fairness, what once seemed politically impossible can become reality.***

About the authors: Laurie Simons & Terry Sterrenberg are counselors, filmmakers, activists and pretty much ordinary citizens who, like many others, are trying to make a difference as we face the challenges of today's society. They produced [The Healthcare Movie](#) in 2011, and [NOW IS THE TIME: Healthcare for Everybody](#) in 2016, to address some of the myths surrounding the idea of national universal healthcare.

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