



February 3, 2003

## OPEN LETTER

### *To Canada's First Ministers: Failure is not an option*

Dear First Ministers:

As you prepare to meet in Ottawa, there is a unique opportunity to chart the course for a sustainable, accountable, innovative and integrated health system for all Canadians. The time for debate is over. Now is the time for a comprehensive plan.

As national associations representing hundreds of thousands of health care providers and managers across our country, the Canadian Nurses Association (CNA), the Canadian Medical Association (CMA), the Canadian Pharmacists Association (CPhA), and the Canadian Healthcare Association (CHA) are united on the need for health system change. We, along with all governments, must work in the best interest of Canadians to meet current and future health needs. Failure to do so is not an option.

We urge First Ministers to deliver a comprehensive plan that addresses four key issues:

1. Access to services across the continuum of care must be improved to alleviate Canadians' fears that they will not have care when and where they need it. This will mean not only maintaining existing services, but also developing new services to better meet Canadians' needs.
2. A national health human resources strategy that is both integrated and interdisciplinary must be developed to ensure Canadians have access to care. The system needs an "all hands on deck" approach with providers working together. We also believe that there is "no win" in playing one provider group against another.
3. National objectives and comparable performance indicators must be developed to improve accountability and transparency. It is reasonable and necessary for federal health funds to be linked to these national objectives. In addition, a public accountability mechanism would help to de-politicize health care and create a pan-Canadian forum to engage citizens and health care providers and managers on an ongoing basis in the renewal of our health system.
4. A sustainable financing plan must include an immediate increase to the cash floor of the Canada Health and Social Transfer and an escalator so that its value does not decline over time. New federal funds are also needed to facilitate transition, support appropriate system change and meet the future health needs of Canadians.

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As health care providers and managers, we will continue to work hard to maintain services while coping with restrained public funding, increased demands of a growing and aging population, and advances in information and medical technology. We remain committed to working with governments toward health system renewal. We urge First Ministers to invite the expertise and experience of health system managers and providers to the decision-making table where plans for renewal are developed and implemented.

The key to the First Ministers reaching agreement will be for the federal government to commit to adequate levels of funding now and in the future. And for the Premiers to agree to national objectives tied to new federal funding.

Canadians are demanding accountability from all levels of government. An accountability mechanism involving citizens and health care providers and managers must report to Canadians on the progress being made as we renew our health care system.

Our message to all First Ministers is-- failure is not an option.



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