

BULLETIN

Public Health Care Advocates to Premiers: Now is the Time for Leadership to Renew and Strengthen Medicare

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VANCOUVER, BRITISH COLUMBIA--(Marketwire - Jan. 16, 2012) - Council of the Federation meeting on health sustainability is an opportunity for premiers to address growing out-of-pocket health care spending on for-profit care and demand federal funding commitment to a renewed health accord.

Public health care advocates and allies from across Canada are calling on premiers to work together to address health spending cost drivers while they meet in Victoria over the next two days.

The advocates, which include the BC Health Coalition, the Council of Canadians, the National Union of Public and General Employees and Canadian Doctors for Medicare, also say that it's time to put the myth of an unsustainable public health care system to rest.

"The evidence is clear: public health care is sustainable and the real driver of increases in health care spending comes from out-of-pocket costs for private health services not covered by Medicare, and from inappropriate use of expensive services," says BCHC co-chair Rachel Tutte.

The group argues that the 2014 health accord presents an opportunity to strengthen the public health care system that Canadians value so highly.

"Youth care about the future of health care in Canada and are passionate about values of equity-these need to be part of any discussion about sustainability," says Vince Terstappen of Check Your Head, a youth organization that travels B.C. talking with young people about health care.

"Public health care workers in Canada believe our Medicare system is a triumph of Canadian values and economic wisdom," says NUPGE representative Val Avery, adding that the premiers' meeting is a chance for the provinces to push for the establishment of a national pharmacare program and national home and community care legislation to improve health care for Canadians and ensure that the system remains sustainable.

Responding to the federal government's recent announcement that it would cut the Canada Health Transfer, the advocates say that this week's meeting is an opportunity for premiers to stand together and keep the federal government at the health care table.

"Abandoning leadership is not the way to improve the sustainability of our health care system, and it contradicts the values of Canadians," says Dr. Vanessa Brcic of Canadian Doctors for Medicare.

"Today we implore our first ministers to uphold the values expressed in the Canada Health Act and urge the federal government to get back to the table and work with the provinces on behalf of all Canadians to improve our health care system."

The group argues that decreasing health transfers distances the federal government even further from its ability and responsibility to enforce the Canada Health Act.

"The Harper government should be looking across Canada to find best practices in health care and tie their implementation to an accord based on predictable, sustained federal funding that includes a six percent escalator for a full ten years," says Council of Canadians Chair Maude Barlow.

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