



Canadian Health Coalition Coalition canadienne de la santé

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Media Release
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HEALTH COALITION CELEBRATES 30TH ANNIVERSARY:

HARPER SHOULD HONOUR NATIONAL MEDICARE WEEK BY ACTING ON PRIVATE CLINICS, INITIATING PHARMACARE

OTTAWA — Prime Minister Stephen Harper is urged to use National Medicare Week (Nov. 17-24) to show federal leadership on health care by enforcing the *Canada Health Act* and by initiating a national public drug plan for all Canadians. The request came from the Canadian Health Coalition (CHC), which today is marking its 30th anniversary of fighting for, protecting and encouraging the expansion of Medicare.

“As the debate over health care rages in the United States, Canadians can celebrate the 25th anniversary of the *Canada Health Act*, which brought accessible, universal, quality public health care to all our citizens, regardless of their ability to pay,” said Linda Silas, President, Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions. “There could not be a better time than National Medicare Week for the Prime Minister to finally show the leadership that Canadians want and need on health care.”

In a letter to Mr. Harper signed by Kathleen Connors, Shirley Douglas, Hon. Monique Bégin, Robert McMurtry, Robert G. Evans and Sharon Sholzberg-Gray, the CHC asked the Prime Minister to:

- Celebrate the legacy of Medicare by publicly reaffirming your government’s commitment to the principles of the *Canada Health Act* as well as adequate and secure federal funding;
- Protect Medicare today by immediately enforcing the *Canada Health Act* in the many cases of extra-billing, user fees, privatization and queue-jumping now spreading across the country; and
- Create the Medicare of the future by taking immediate steps to initiate a national public drug plan (Pharmacare) that will provide better access, more value for money, and better prescribing practices.

“Since Medicare began, it has been threatened by user fees, extra-billing and privatization,” said Dr. Irfan Dhalla from Canadian Doctors for Medicare. “While governments have acted in the past, Mr. Harper’s government has indicated it's clearly not interested in enforcing the *Canada Health Act*. It has instead turned a blind eye as private, for-profit clinics regularly break the law, and now - as a result - an emboldened group of for-profit clinics in B.C. have launched a court action to have Medicare laws struck down.”

“The challenge for the future is to expand Medicare to respond to the changing health needs of Canadians,” said Robert G. Evans, Director of the Population Health Program at University of British Columbia. “Today prescription drugs save lives but too many Canadians can’t afford them. We must initiate a national public drug plan that addresses access, affordability and appropriateness of prescribing behavior.”

The Canadian Health Coalition is marking its 30th anniversary with a panel discussion and a gala reception and fundraiser featuring actor and director Mary Walsh; musical Guests: Connie Kaldor, Teresa Healy & Tom Juravich, Bob Carty, and James Stephens; and after-dinner speaker Julie Mason whose “Critical Condition” bi-weekly column in the Ottawa Citizen focuses on health care issues, including protecting Medicare. The afternoon panel discussion, moderated by Nik Nanos of Nanos Research, will include panelists Linda Silas, Robert Evans, Irfan Dhalla, and Brenda Stocks..

The 30th anniversary events will take place in the *Le Salon* and *Panorama* rooms of the National Arts Centre. The panel discussion gets underway at 3:30 p.m., with the gala reception starting at 6 p.m.

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The Canadian Health Coalition is a public advocacy organization dedicated to the preservation and improvement of Medicare. Our membership is comprised of national organizations representing nurses, health care workers, seniors, churches, anti-poverty groups, women and trade unions, as well as affiliated coalitions in 9 provinces and one territory.



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