



CANADIAN
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December 21, 2011

The Right Honourable Stephen Harper
Prime Minister of Canada
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Dear Prime Minister Harper,

On behalf of the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions, we are writing to urge you to commit to negotiating an agreement with the provinces on health care. In light of Minister Flaherty's announcement this week regarding the future federal funding commitments for health care, it is unclear what role this government will play in ensuring continuous quality improvement and comparable levels of services for all Canadians.

The last Accord was more than a funding deal – it laid out a vision, principles and actions to improve the quality, accessibility and sustainability of our public health care system. It delivered results in some areas, especially those that were also supported by targeted federal funding windows, specifically wait times and diagnostic imaging.

The ending of the current Health Accord in 2014 is a huge opportunity to seek national consensus on how to transform health care in a way that ensures better population health, better care and bends the cost curves. The unilateral decision to forego a 6% escalator for the length of the next agreement will likely bend the provincial cost curve in that it will result in cuts to services, rather than improved value for money.

Hospitals across this country are at overcapacity. Nurses worked the equivalent of 11,400 full-time jobs in overtime last year. There are inequalities in access to and quality of home care, drug coverage and residential long-term care facilities, widening between provinces and populations. A new agreement with clear goals, measurable targets, improved accountability and transparency involving all levels of government is needed to address these and other issues while ensuring reasonable comparability of quality and access to comparable services. Without a strong federal role, health disparities are going to increase and innovations that are occurring that deliver better value for money will not be scaled up.

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A strong federal presence does not mean intrusion or micromanagement. It is not a question of jurisdictions accounting to Ottawa; it is about all governments being accountable to their citizens. Ottawa has an obligation to fund, lead, aspire, and inspire in pursuit of creating the best health care system in the world. The system is in danger only when we tolerate fragmentation, where programs, institutions, and provinces compete against rather than learn from each other. Canadians want cooperation to ensure that every health care worker, every program, every facility, and every jurisdiction gets better at what they do every day.

We urge you to work with your provincial colleagues on a shared change agenda for public health care, premised on the principles of the *Canada Health Act* and based on evidence to ensure better value for money.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Linda Silas', written over a horizontal line.

Linda Silas, President

Cc.: Leona Aglukkaq, Minister of Health
Jim Flaherty, Minister of Finance
Nycole Turmel, Interim Leader of the Official Opposition
Bob Rae, Interim Leader of the Liberal Party of Canada