

HEALTH ACTION LOBBY (HEAL) RESPONDS TO 2006 BUDGET

Ottawa; May 3/CNW Telbec- The Health Action Lobby (HEAL) offered a mixed response to yesterday's release of the Harper Government's first budget, indicating support in general but cautioning that additional funding for ongoing health initiatives including health human resources must remain a government priority.

HEAL welcomed funding in support of pandemic preparedness, the Canadian Strategy for Cancer Control, the Child Disability Benefit and support for the 10-Year Plan to Strengthen Health Care. HEAL also supported funding aimed at the 'establishment of a Canadian agency for the assessment and recognition of foreign credentials' and looks forward to the opportunity for greater consultation as this important endeavour unfolds.

The coalition, however, noted several areas of concern, specifically the lack of additional funding in support of wait times initiatives, electronic health and networking, chronic disease management and health human resources (HHR). HEAL also expressed its concern over the absence of a clearly stated federal role in healthcare, as highlighted on pg. 20 of the companion document to the budget speech, "*Restoring Fiscal Balance in Canada.*" HEAL was formed in 1991 as a result of concern by healthcare and consumer organizations over the erosion of the federal government's role in supporting a national health care system.

Yesterday's speech stated "Budgets say something about your motivation and goals. They say something about priorities." "By not committing additional funding to ensure we have adequate numbers of health personnel available to meet demand, the government is missing an opportunity to build on the momentum gained in this critical area over the past few years. Regrettably, this budget insufficiently recognizes this critical need, so eloquently articulated in recent provincial and national reports." stated Pamela Fralick, HEAL Chair.

"Yesterday's budget reinforces the government's commitment to improvements around the wait times issue, however, they are failing to make the intrinsic link between HHR and a reduction in wait times," explains Fralick. Only through a coordinated pan-Canadian approach and appropriate funding can this critical issue be effectively addressed."

HHR has been a top priority in broad rounds of stakeholder consultations, the First Ministers Accord on Health Care Renewal (February 2004) and was reinforced in the 2004 10-year plan to Strengthen Health Care. The federal government, in partnership with provinces and territories, has shown leadership in recently developing a framework for coordinated HHR planning. HEAL looks forward to further enhancing that action by bringing the provider voice into the debate", explains Pamela Fralick, HEAL Chair and CEO of the Canadian Physiotherapy Association.

Recognizing the need to advance the HHR issue, HEAL recently released a discussion paper, entitled *Core Principles and Strategic Directions for a Pan-Canadian Health Human Resources Plan*, offering strategic, co-ordinated solutions to Canada's growing health human resource crisis.

An Ipsos-Reid poll conducted last month for HEAL showed that 91 per cent of Canadians support development of a health care workforce plan based on the projected demographic and health needs. Ninety-three per cent indicated that Canada should strive to become self-sufficient in training enough health professionals to meet future needs, with only 36 per cent of respondents confident that Canada will have enough health professionals to meet future demand.

The Health Action Lobby (HEAL), a coalition of 30 national health and consumer associations and organizations dedicated to protecting and strengthening Canada's health care system, represents more than half a million providers and consumers of health care.

You can access a synopsis of the document: Core Principles and Strategic Directions for a Pan-Canadian Health Human Resources Plan at <http://www.physiotherapy.ca/HEAL/english/>

The full document may also be downloaded at <http://www.physiotherapy.ca/HEAL/english/>

For further information:

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