



MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release

HEALTH ACTION LOBBY (HEAL) WARNS JOB NOT DONE

OTTAWA, March 20 – The Health Action Lobby (HEAL) offered a mixed response to yesterday's release of the Harper Government's second budget. HEAL applauds the Government's focus on the environment, which has direct links to the health of Canadians, as well as select social programs. HEAL cautions, however, that the future well-being and health of Canadians is also critically dependent upon funding for coordinated health human resource planning aimed at providing all Canadians greater access to the health services they require to lead productive, healthy and happy lives.

HEAL was pleased at funding announcements for a Canadian Mental Health Commission and the increase to the Canadian Social Transfer which will have a positive impact on post-secondary education, an important determinant of health. HEAL also viewed several other allocations as positive steps, including the modest allocation to Canadian Health Infoway to advance work on the Electronic Health Record (EHR), and additional, albeit also modest funding to the Canadian Institute for Health Information.

However, HEAL particularly notes the lack of clearly identifiable funding for coordinated health human resource (HHR) planning. "Without the people – health providers – and investments in initiatives to support them, the success of all health efforts are in jeopardy," explains Pamela Fralick, HEAL Chair and CEO of the Canadian Physiotherapy Association. "Canadians deserve a coordinated pan-Canadian approach to HHR. They want to see a seamless system – one which addresses priority issues such as self-sufficiency of providers and labour mobility concerns. Simply put, they want the right health provider at the right time in the right place." Over the past two years, federal, provincial and territorial governments, in consultation with key stakeholders, have worked hard to create a pan-Canadian HHR strategy. Fralick reflected key HEAL concerns in the questions, "Where will the funding for these initiatives come from? Where is the coordinating mechanism which provides cohesion to the fragmented health initiatives reflected in today's budget?"

HHR is a pan-Canadian issue – health providers move from province to territory to province – and this calls for appropriate leadership. While HEAL values the significant funding increases to health in recent years, and appreciates the progress made in various areas as a result, it is important that focus and direction are not allowed to falter. For example, while new funds were allocated to wait times initiatives – a positive move – guidelines to direct use of these funds, plus a commitment to ensure HHR issues are addressed at the same time, appear to be missing. Wait times have an integral link to HHR issues, and so both must be addressed to truly have an impact on Canadians' access to priority health services. The budget reflects a lack of understanding that the job is not yet done. This is disappointing in light of past budgetary investments in primary health care, wait times and health human resources (HHR).

"On behalf of all Canadians, HEAL's members want better guarantees for patient access to quality health services," says Fralick. "HEAL brings these urgent health provider issues to Government in order to stimulate further debate and action on health for all Canadians."

The Health Action Lobby (HEAL) is a coalition of 34 national health and consumer associations and organizations dedicated to protecting and strengthening Canada's health system. HEAL represents more than half a million providers and consumers of health care in Canada.

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