Time to bring health care back to the table

Governments, health-care providers and organizations, and even our communities, need to make changes that keep the really important end goal in mind—the health of Canadians. There is a better way.

OTTAWA—During the last federal election, health care dropped right off the table when federal politicians debated the issues. While clearly a priority for most Canadians, there really wasn’t a substantive conversation about health-care needs and reforms in 2011. Had health care become a Pandora’s box of problems and conflict, just like the Constitution?

The Health Action Lobby (HEAL), a national coalition representing 39 health professions and organizations, and approximately 650,000 health sector members, doesn’t want to see that happen again. Health care matters to Canadians, really matters. In a recent Nanos Research poll Canadians scored health care as a top priority—7.6 on a 10-point scale—for all political parties in the next federal election.

In late 2014, HEAL put health care solidly back on the table with the release of a Consensus Statement called The Canadian Way: Accelerating Innovation and Improving Health System Performance. It contains recommendations about how to improve the accountability and performance of our health system. And it offers a roadmap to reform with insights from the experts who plan and manage our health system and care for us in clinics, hospitals, and community-care institutions, clinicians’ offices and in our homes. We’re talking about physicians, nurses, social workers, pharmacists, physiotherapists, psychologists, and all of the key health professions, coming together with a common purpose and voice.

The Canadian Way includes proposals that will encourage care more affordably and economically, producing better health outcomes. The proposal focuses on the funding and service delivery gaps that are really hurting Canadians, individually and collectively. Issues like aging, the cost of drugs, mental health challenges, stable funding, geographic and economic inequities, and shortages of community-based health professionals working in teams.

HEAL believes there is a way to navigate the rocky road of Canada’s health-care future—the Canadian Way—an approach rooted in consensus, collaboration, and compassion. It would require everybody to step up and meet what is consistently a priority for people across Canada—health and health care. By collaborating and sharing information, governments, health systems and providers can devise new and sustainable funding strategies and community-based pilots, along with ways to encourage innovation. The federal government, in particular, can and must provide real leadership, working with the provinces to make this happen.

HEAL encourages the adoption of the widely used Triple Aim approach to health management, a performance system that balances better health of populations, better care and better value in a patient-focused system.

The Canadian Way is a call to action to our political party leaders and to governments at all levels. HEAL recommends, evidence-based solutions and innovation, federal leadership, specific targeted investments, and a quintessential Canadian commitment to collaboration.

Just as primary health care has recognized that care improves when health professionals work in teams, so Canada needs a team approach to building a sustainable, innovative, and responsive health-care system. Successful teams draw on the unique strengths and expertise of their members, show leadership and deliver results.

In the coming months, HEAL members will encourage our political leaders to restate a national dialogue about health care and articulate their own positions in advance of the 2015 election. HEAL will ask the federal government to assert its leadership in key areas and commit to a renewed and sustained working relationship with the provinces and territories. Governments, health-care providers and organizations, and even our communities, need to make changes that keep the really important and goal in mind—the health of Canadians. There is a better way. It is the Canadian Way.

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