

October 31, 2002

The Right Honourable Jean Chrétien
Prime Minister of Canada
House of Commons
Ottawa, Canada K1A 0A2

RE: Strengthening Canada's Health Care System

Dear Prime Minister Chrétien:

Encouraged by your recent Speech from the Throne, "The Canada We Want" in which you outline the plans for your government in the next few years, I am writing to request an appointment for a delegation of church leaders to meet with you regarding the future of health care in Canada. Safeguarding the well being of people by addressing their needs – particularly of poor children and health care services for all -- is an important role for government. We share the view that this is a moment when leadership is required and when a renewed investment must be made in those programs that foster greater equity and social well being.

The Canadian churches have been highly supportive of Canada's public, not-for-profit, universal system of health care. Churches have historically and continue to provide health care services. Many from our community provide pastoral care to patients, families and staff. We understand that healthy communities require healthy people, that is realized only when we fulfill our collective responsibility for each other. Thus we certainly agree that,

"No issue touches Canadians more deeply than health care. Our health care system is a practical expression of the values that define us as a country. Of the willingness of Canadians to share risk and accept responsibility for one another."

More recently, the Canadian churches have been active participants in the debate about how we might preserve and indeed strengthen Canada's health care system. Within The Canadian Council of Churches, our Ecumenical Health Care Network has been working on these issues. The Network appeared before the The Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology, presented to the Royal Commission on the Future of Health Care in Canada, hosted a major roundtable in Ottawa, met with members of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health, and hosted 18 workshops with close to 1000 community leaders across the country to discuss the future of health care and encourage participation in the Royal Commission. Arising from this consultative process, a central contribution of the Ecumenical Health Network was "A Health Care Covenant for All People in Canada" as an expression of the values we share.

We know that at the end of October, the Senate will be releasing Volume Six of their report and by the middle of November, the Royal Commission report is due to be made public. There are numerous ideas that will be brought forward by these reports. We are looking to ways to build on the community dialogue that has started. We support the view that “*The Canada we want cannot happen by government acting alone or by citizens acting apart...*”. Citizens must continue to be included in these decisions. In this regard, I am writing to ask how you intend to proceed once the Royal Commission report is released. Will the Report be submitted to Parliament? Will the Standing Committee on Health be asked to make recommendations? Are there other ideas you have for encouraging continued participation?

Secondly, as mentioned at the outset of this letter I am writing to request an opportunity for a delegation of church leaders to meet with you regarding the proposals that will be coming from the Royal Commission on the Future of Health Care, before the scheduled First Minister’s Meeting. We would like to discuss how “A Health Care Covenant for All People in Canada.” might be helpful as an expression of the values we share and how it would help us address the other issues that are of concern to the faith communities and the public. In addition to the more specific proposals, these reports and the recommendations that will emerge will result in an important moral and ethical discussion. It would be our hope that such a meeting might ensure that churches and faith groups can play a constructive role in this important discussion for our national community.

Sincerely yours,

The Most Rev. André Vallée,
President, Canadian Council of Churches

Enclosure: Health Care Covenant for All People in Canada