



31 March 2006

The Right Honourable Stephen Harper
Prime Minister of Canada
Langevin Block 80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A2

Dear Prime Minister Harper,

We are very concerned that almost one month after the Government of Alberta announced its 10 point proposal for "Health Care Renewal" your government has not stated unequivocally your intention to defend and enforce the Canada Health Act.

One of the Alberta proposals for renewal would allow physicians to work in both the public and private health care systems at the same time. This would clearly be a violation of the Canada Health Act.

A reason given for the changes is to improve choice and access. That would only be the case for those persons able to pay out of pocket or buy insurance. Clearly this would not be just or equitable.

Furthermore there is a shortage of doctors and nurses in Canada. The Alberta proposals would mean less of these scarce resources in the public system and, if affluent Alberta draws them from other provinces, less in the poorer regions of this nation.

Improving long term sustainability of the health care system has been given as another reason for the proposed changes. However in countries where private spending is high the total cost of health services is higher not less. The United States spends more public dollars per person than Canada does but still leaves millions with no coverage.

There is no evidence that the proposed change will reduce waiting lists. On the contrary countries that allow doctors to work in the public and private systems at the same time have long wait lists. Examples are the United Kingdom, Ireland, New Zealand and Australia.

Alberta has already demonstrated that wait lists can be reduced in the publicly funded system. They recently announced that their pilot project for hip and knee surgery had reduced wait times to a fraction of the average wait time.

The churches have long advocated for a health care system that is just and equitable for all Canadians. We believe that can only be achieved in a publicly funded system that adheres strictly to the principles set out in the Canada Health Act. Furthermore we believe issues of sustainability and wait times are best addressed within that framework.

We call on you, Prime Minister Harper, to state now and in clear terms that your government intends to keep the commitment made during the recent election campaign.

Please be assured of our prayers and support as you undertake to fulfill your important responsibilities.

Sincerely,



Jim Marshall, co-chair
The United Church of Canada
Ecumenical Health Care Network



Linda Nichols, co-chair
The Anglican Church of Canada
Ecumenical Health Care Network

Cc: The Honourable Tony Clement, Minister, Health Canada (613) 952-1154

The Ecumenical Health Care Network (www.ccc-cce.ca/english/justice/health)

Canadian churches working together to contribute an ethical voice to the ongoing dialogue and debate about the future of health care in Canada. The Ecumenical Health Network is a project of the Commission on Justice and Peace of the **Canadian Council of Churches**. The Canadian Council of Churches is the largest ecumenical body in Canada, now representing 20 churches of Anglican, Eastern and Oriental Orthodox, Protestant and Roman Catholic traditions.