

January 30, 2004

The Right Honourable Paul Martin
Prime Minister of Canada
80, rue Wellington
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A2

Fax: (613) 941-6900

Dear Mr. Prime Minister:

Accompanying our best wishes, we wish to send our sincere congratulations, as you became Prime Minister of Canada last month. This great responsibility brings with it the possibility of achieving tremendous good for Canadians and many other persons around the world. We pray that God's blessings are with you as you assume this demanding new role.

As leaders of Canada's major Christian Churches, we write to you today concerning one of the issues of most pressing importance to Canadians: the future of health care in Canada. Along with most Canadians we welcomed with great anticipation and hope the final report of the Commission on the Future of Health Care in Canada. It was aptly called *Building on Values*, and the very first recommendation was to "establish a new Canadian Health Covenant as a tangible statement of Canadians' values and a guiding force for our publicly funded health care system." (Romanow Report, November 2002, p. xxiv). Not only did the Churches agree with this emphasis; we had been the ones to suggest it to Commissioner Romanow in the testimony of the Ecumenical Health Care Network (a project of the Canadian Council of Churches) at an Ottawa public hearing on May 28, 2002. (Attached please see our proposed *Health Care Covenant for All People in Canada*.)

We continue to be convinced that the path to beneficial and sustainable reform of Canada's most cherished social program lies in establishing a common vision that reflects the values and priorities of Canadians: values such as equity, collective responsibility, compassion and caring. The process of developing and adopting a Health Covenant would greatly assist in this effort.

That is why, Mr. Prime Minister, we ask you to urge your Minister of Health to commit immediately to the adoption of a *Health Care Covenant for All People in Canada*, which would clearly express the values and objectives of the health care system and become a set of guiding principles for policy makers, health care managers and health providers as they work to improve care in this country.

We are pleased that the appointments to the Health Council have been made. We believe that the mandate of the Health Council would be assisted and guided by the *Health Care Covenant for All People in Canada*. We, therefore, strongly urge that you request your Minister of Health to table the *Covenant* at an early meeting of the Council and urge the Council to engage in a process to adopt the *Health Care Covenant for All People in Canada*.

It is our hope that the Health Council is transparent in its mandate and that it regularly consult with the Canadian public on the values that undergird health care as well as its policies and programs.

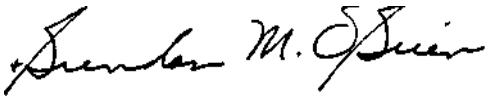
Mr. Martin, as we have recently celebrated the birth of Christ, many Canadian families and communities paused to reflect on how, from an extremely humble beginning, a great blessing came into the world. The arrival of the new year marks a most appropriate moment for your government to give life to a participative, values-based process for health care reform in Canada, by the establishment of a Health Council and a *Health Care Covenant for All People in Canada*. The members of the Ecumenical Health Care Network are at your disposal, and that of your officials, to discuss these proposals further at your convenience.

Mr. Prime Minister, we wish you, your family and your collaborators abundant blessings throughout 2004.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Michael G. Peers". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large, prominent loop at the end of the name.

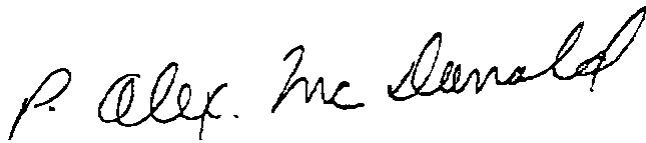
The Most Rev. Michael G. Peers
Primate
The Anglican Church of Canada



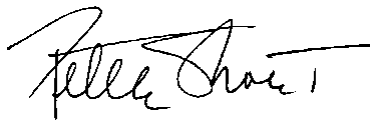
+ Brendan M. O'Brien
Archbishop of St. John's
President
Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops



Rev. Raymond Schultz
National Bishop
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada



The Rev. P. Alex McDonald
Moderator, 129th General Assembly
The Presbyterian Church in Canada



The Right Rev. Peter Short
Moderator
United Church of Canada

A HEALTH CARE COVENANT FOR ALL PEOPLE IN CANADA

The Ecumenical Health Care Network of The Canadian Council of Churches

April 2002

Preamble

People in Canada understand that how we care for others defines the nature of who we are as a national community. We also know that what we owe each other is essential for who we are as a people. Thus, we have empowered our governments to steward public resources and develop and administer social policy for the common good of all; to ensure that,

Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and his family, including food, clothing, housing, and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

U.N. Universal Declaration on Human Rights, Article 25

As signatory to the World Health Organization Charter, we in Canada have pledged ourselves to a holistic vision of well-being that understands 'health' as [...] *a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.*

As members of a national community, we in Canada understand that a community actively promotes and nurtures health through compassion, mutuality, care, trust, respect, security and active attention to what justice requires of us.

Thus, in fulfillment of our mutual responsibilities, we and our governments solemnly promise to actively pursue and safeguard a holistic and integrated vision of health care for all people in Canada.

A HEALTH CARE COVENANT FOR ALL PEOPLE IN CANADA

Through government, we in Canada pledge to:

Universal Access, Comprehensiveness and Portability

- provide access to comprehensive health care services for individuals, families and communities that places the priority on the worth and dignity of the whole person and their biological, emotional, physical, environmental, social and spiritual needs wherever they may be in Canada;

Social Solidarity and Justice

- uphold a health care system through which all people in Canada share the benefits of health and the burdens of illness with particular compassion for the weak, caring for the vulnerable, solidarity with our neighbours and a commitment to social justice for all;

Open to All People in Canada

- preserve inviolate a health care system that applies to all people in Canada without discrimination toward race, colour, sex, sexual orientation, ability, disability, ethnic origin, language, place of residence, economic status, religion or any other distinction;

Social Health and Well-being

- utilize a systemic approach to creating public policies that, intentionally integrate the social, economic, cultural and environmental determinants of well-being with health;

Human Right and Public Good

- ensure that access to health care is maintained as a human right and a public good, recognizing that health care interactions have meaning to people as a place of caring; health care is not a commodity;

Honour the Vocation and Contribution of All Health Care Providers

- utilize fully the capabilities of all health care professionals, including indigenous practitioners covered under the Canada Health Act, and honour the vocation of all who provide care, whether paid or unpaid;

Public Stewardship and Accountability

- safeguard public administration and limit for-profit delivery of care through mutually enforceable federal and provincial regulations upholding standards of public accountability for a system that addresses the health care needs of individuals, families and communities;

Collaboration and Shared Responsibility

- develop and sustain a health care system founded upon the principles of collaboration and shared responsibility between governments and among providers, not competition or market imperatives; and

Participation and Decision-making

- recognize that health is unique to individuals, families and communities and as such, to honour the right of people to participate in the decisions that affect them and their health.