

Health Care

“Canadians have told their governments, year after year, to renew Medicare, to stop bickering and work together to ensure that it will be there for them and their children... The Plan commits to a 10-year track of substantial, predictable long-term funding, closing what has been called the ‘Romanow Gap’.”

Speech from the Throne
as delivered, October 4, 2004

Medicare is Canadians’ top priority. The Canadian Labour Congress welcomes the First Ministers’ Agreement on Health Care which secures stable and predictable federal funding for health over the next decade, restores federal cash transfers and the cost escalator, and acknowledges the need to take action on aboriginal and northern health services as well as recognizing the unique role of Quebec.

This Agreement marks a significant step toward improving health care for all Canadians. But this progress could unravel without further action:

Public tax dollars should be used exclusively for the public, not-for-profit delivery of health care. The First Ministers’ Agreement is silent on the question of for-profit delivery of health services. The trend toward private parallel for-profit health services threatens the integrity and viability of the public health care system. It must be stopped.

Accountability for health spending is still missing. Control over how and where money is spent is essential to Medicare’s future. Legislation authorizing the increased federal contribution must include explicit provisions for accountability to ensure that funds go to public or not-for-profit health care providers.

Enforcement of the Canada Health Act is paramount. The Act is the backbone of Medicare. Ensuring that its five criteria and two conditions are met by all provinces is the federal government’s responsibility.

Medicare will need to be expanded to meet critical needs. The next steps in meeting the health care needs of Canadians include extending Medicare to include homecare and pharmacare programs.

By meeting and, indeed, exceeding the gap in health care funding identified by Roy Romanow, the federal government will improve health care for Canadians.

Nonetheless, this secure and stable funding will only be effective if accompanied by explicit provisions for accountability plus a guarantee that public dollars are invested in health care for Canadians and not taken for private profit.

We look forward to working with you toward these important objectives.

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