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BC HEALTH COALITION

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Friends of Medicare campaign to promote positive, public solutions to province's health care challenges

The BC Health Coalition, along with Canadian Doctors for Medicare, Oxfam and the Council of Canadians, today launched *Friends of Medicare*, a campaign to protect and improve public health care in B.C.

“We’re hearing from people throughout the province that what our health care system needs is positive, public solutions to address challenges in the system, and they are concerned their voices aren’t being heard by a government intent on private, for-profit schemes for health care,” said BCHC co-chair Joyce Jones.

The *Friends of Medicare* campaign is aimed at giving British Columbians a strong voice in opposition to the government’s agenda for private health care, promoting instead various public solutions to health care challenges.

“We are calling on British Columbians who’ve told us they want to take a more active role in protecting and enhancing public health care to join the *Friends of Medicare* campaign and participate actively in delivering that message,” said BCHC co-chair Anne Shannon.

The campaign kicks off this week with a public town hall meeting Thursday night featuring Dr. Jacky Davis, who has exposed how damaging “market competition” schemes like the ones being promoted by the provincial government have been in the United Kingdom. Dr. Davis is a founding member of “Keep our NHS Public,” a successful community-driven campaign to stop and roll back government action to dismantle the National Health Service – Britain’s public health care system.

“We’ve seen in Britain the damage that an attack on the public health system has done. And while I want you to learn from our mistakes, I believe you can also learn from our successes. Keep our NHS Public has been an important channel for Britons to come together to speak out for the health of our public system,” Dr. Davis said.

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Dr. Margaret McGregor said Canadian Doctors for Medicare support the campaign to give British Columbians a strong voice for medicare. “Evidence from the U.K. and other jurisdictions shows that widespread introduction of privately-funded health care increases overall costs and drains human resources from the public system.”

Thursday’s public forum will begin at 7 p.m. at the Croatian Cultural Centre, 3250 Commercial Drive in Vancouver. Along with Dr. Davis, the forum will feature B.C. political commentator Will McMartin. He will expose the falsehoods behind the provincial government’s claims that public health care spending is unsustainable.

Friends of Medicare is making a direct appeal to British Columbians, through an extensive direct mail campaign and an interactive website – www.bchealthcoalition.ca, to join the campaign, become supporters, and participate in *Friends of Medicare* activities that urge the provincial government to implement and expand the public programs that work for British Columbians’ health.

Leslie Dickout, the health coalition’s medicare campaigner, says that support for universal, public health care is wide-spread. “As more and more British Columbians join the *Friends of Medicare* campaign, they will become a powerful voice to convince the government to strengthen and enhance medicare with positive, public solutions, and not continue down the road of more costly private, for-profit schemes.”

The BC Health Coalition is a broad-based network of organizations and individuals who support public health care.

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Contact: Leslie Dickout, medicare campaigner, BC Health Coalition, 604-787-6560