



Premiers must focus on strategies that will strengthen public health care

CUPE newsletter: CUPE urges all premiers, currently at the Council of the Federation meeting in Victoria, to agree on strategies to protect and strengthen public health care.

Canada's largest union is confident the provinces and territories will be stronger if they bring a unified message - with common priority proposals - to the federal government.

Among these priorities should be a continuing care strategy for seniors and a plan to reduce prescription drug costs. CUPE also calls on provinces to reject further privatization of services – that would increase costs, reduce accessibility, and worsen wait times in the public system.

Finance Minister Jim Flaherty's unilateral pronouncement on future health care funding is wrong. The Conservative government's approach is clearly undermining the *Canada Health Act*, and will ultimately lead to greater privatization.

"We all need to work together to find solutions, to make the system better," says Paul Moist, national president of CUPE, that represents over 190,000 health care workers in Canada. "We need to do this cooperatively with the federal, provincial and territorial governments, along with other stakeholders such as the front line health care workers."

Despite the cuts announced in December by Flaherty, CUPE is calling on the federal government to start negotiation with the provinces and territories for a renewed ten-year Health Accord, with stable and adequate funding - including at minimum the six per cent escalator for the duration of the agreement.

In order to defend and improve the public health care system, the federal government must also:

- Enforce the *Canada Health Act*, including the ban on user fees and extra billing, and correct gaps in monitoring and reporting under the *Act*.
- Create a health care infrastructure fund that stipulates public non-profit financing, ownership, management, and operation.
- Promote public sector solutions to shorten wait times.
- Implement a federal/provincial/territorial strategy to reduce healthcare associated infections with dedicated funding for microbiological cleaning standards, more in-house cleaning staff, lower hospital occupancy, and mandatory public reporting.

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- Create a pan-Canadian continuing care (residential and home and community care) program, with dedicated transfers financed from general revenue and *Canada Health Act* standards plus minimum staffing and non-profit delivery.
- Promote primary care reform, with funding and regulation, based on the community health centre model.
- Invest in Aboriginal health and meet the goals of the Kelowna Accord, improve water quality on reserves, and cover shortfalls in the Non-Insured Health Benefits Program.
- Implement the National Pharmaceutical Strategy agreed to in the 2004 Health Accord and establish a national pharmacare program.
- Exempt health care from CETA, the trade agreement Canada is negotiating with the European Union, and block extended patent protection for brand name drugs.
- Support employment equity and ethical recruitment, and include the full spectrum of health care workers in a pan-Canadian health human resources strategy.

January 16, 2012