



Our Medicare

The greatest Canadian idea ever



Back to the negotiating table

The battle to protect our Medicare never ends. ■ The threat this time comes from the upcoming negotiations to renew the Health Accord and the Canada Health Transfer (CHT). ■ We've met threats like this before—it's time to do it again.

In 2002, Canadians mobilized around the Romanow Commission which was studying the future of Canada's public health care system. The Commission concluded that Medicare must be protected and expanded and it provided a blueprint to do just that. We were determined not to let the Romanow report gather dust on a shelf. We kept mobilizing and pressured our governments to take action.

In 2004, the federal, provincial and territorial governments reached an historic 10-year Health Accord. The deal included an injection of billions of new dollars from the federal government through the Canada Health Transfer (CHT). It also provided stable and predictable funding levels through a built-in escalator of 6% increases in funding every year. It called for action to reduce wait times for key treatments and to expand the system in other areas including home care and prescription drug coverage. The Accord has made a big difference in delivering better care to families. But the Accord and the CHT expire in 2014. And negotiations to renew these agreements are starting now.

Just like 10 years ago, it's going to take a strong national movement to ensure these negotiations result in a new agreement that will protect, strengthen and expand our Medicare. And just like 10 years ago, there are some politicians and right-wing critics responding with shrieks of "we can't

afford it." Once again we must work together to expose this dubious claim and ensure our governments reach a new long-term deal that protects, strengthens and expands our Medicare.

Our Medicare The triumph of values

Medicare is, first and foremost, about reflecting and promoting the core Canadian values of equity and fairness. The system is built on the premise that every single Canadian should get the best medical care available based on need, not wealth. The vast majority of Canadians care deeply about the values at the heart of Medicare. They won't accept any decisions or reforms that undermine these values.

Our Medicare The triumph of economics

Canada's Medicare is more financially efficient and has huge administrative savings compared to private, multi-payer systems like the one in the United States. The total costs of our system are in line with all other wealthy countries in the world and substantially lower than the US. At the same time, our Medicare delivers higher quality care than any private system. Canada's health outcomes on major indicators are a lot better than the US and rank among the best in the world. Medicare also provides businesses in Canada with a competitive advantage and it attracts a lot of jobs to this country because companies don't have to pay for basic health care for their workers.

Our Medicare It's as sustainable as we want it to be
Fundamentally, our Medicare is as sustainable as we want it to be. How governments spend our taxes are choices that we, as citizens, direct them to make. The fact is that Canadians have repeatedly said they support our Medicare and want more tax dollars invested in it – not less!

Our Medicare It's not a spending problem

There is no cost crisis when it comes to Medicare spending. Total health care spending, as a per cent of our Gross Domestic Product (GDP), is currently just slightly higher today than its previous peak in 1992.

Total provincial government health spending has been remarkably stable as a share of GDP in the past 20 years. Today, provincial health spending is only slightly higher than the previous peak in 1989.

The reason it looks like provincial health spending is out of control actually has nothing to do with health care spending. It looks this way because of government cuts in other program spending and dramatic cuts in taxes. That is to say, the health care slice of the total provincial pie looks bigger because other slices, and the total pie, have been getting smaller, while the health care slice has remained about the same. The data speaks clearly: there is no sustainability crisis in health care.

Our Medicare It's a revenue problem

Canada does not have a spending problem. Total government spending as a share of our GDP has decreased every year since 1992. And Canada has the smallest deficit and debt of all G8 countries! But we do have a revenue problem. Since the mid-90s, all levels of government (municipal, provincial and federal) have cut taxes so drastically that they've reduced their revenue by 6% of GDP – that's a loss of \$90 billion in revenue every year. That's more than enough money to not only strengthen our current Medicare system but to also expand it.

Our Medicare We can afford it and we want more of it

It's all about priorities and choices. The Harper government is spending billions of dollars on fighter jets, federal mega-prisons, G20 political slush funds and more corporate tax cuts. There's more than enough

money to protect, strengthen and expand our Medicare – the Harper government just has to make it a priority.

Canadians have repeatedly said they want governments to make our Medicare even better by investing more in the following areas: (a) home care; (b) mental health; (c) long-term care; (d) pharmacare; and (e) a national health human resource strategy.

Our Medicare If not us, who? If not now, when?

Get Involved!

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- * a letter to Harper and your Premier about negotiating a fair deal at <http://alltogethernow.nupge.ca/write-letter>

