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Attn: Assignment Editor

For Immediate Release

## Health Care Advocates Dismayed with Ottawa's Divide and Conquer Tactics: Hopes for a Canadian Health Accord Dashed as Provinces Signs Deal

Toronto/Ottawa/Edmonton: The Ontario, Quebec and Alberta governments, which had initially held out for better, were compelled to sign onto a bilateral health funding deal with Ottawa today. In the federal election, the Trudeau government promised to break with the high-handed approach of the previous Harper government and negotiate a new Health Accord with the provinces and territories. Instead, after tabling a take-it-or-leave-it offer in December, Trudeau's government walked away from the table. It is now forcing through bilateral deals with each province, containing a funding level that is inadequate to meet the health care needs of Canadians and was rejected by the provinces and territories as inadequate in December. The scheme will reduce the federal government's share of health care funding over the next decade, reversing gains made in the 2004 Health Accord.

With the reported signing of bilateral deals by Quebec, Ontario and Alberta today, hope for a Health Accord that will protect and improve Canadians' equal access to health care for the next decade is gone. Health care will now become a major issue leading in federal election, advocates vow.

The bilateral deals set the federal funding level at nominal GDP with a floor of three percent and additional "targeted" funding for mental health and home care. Text of the bilateral deals has not been revealed to the public. In the December Federal-Territorial-Provincial Finance Ministers' meeting, the provinces and territories were calling for a Canada Health Transfer funding escalator that would match projected health care cost growth at 5.2 percent. The expected need for health care funding growth is projected to be 5.2 percent, not 3 percent. There is a broad consensus about this projection. It is in line with the estimates of the Parliamentary Budget Office, the Financial Accountability Office of Ontario and the Conference Board of Canada. Health care advocates are concerned about the process of bilateral deals rather than an equitable national approach leading to inequities across Canada, inadequate funding, and secret language.

"We are disheartened by the Trudeau government's divide and conquer tactics," said Adrienne Silnicki, national coordinator of the Canadian Health Coalition. "The Health Accord negotiations were supposed to be an opportunity to strengthen public health care. Instead we are seeing a funding deal that will force cuts to services and does not commit to upholding the principle of equity in public health care. The federal government is not just abdicating its responsibility to uphold single-tier public health care, it is threatening its future."

"The bottom line is that the funding deal being forced through by Trudeau's government does not meet the evidence for what is needed in Ontario and across Canada. The shortfall will have to be made up by the provinces which have less fiscal room to do so, or services will be cut and privatized," said Natalie Mehra, executive director of the Ontario Health Coalition. "We are deeply concerned that inequities in access to needed health care for Canadian patients will widen as a result of the Trudeau government's tactics. They have put PR before good policy and we fear that Canadian patients will pay the price."

"Instead of using the opportunity afforded by a Health Accord to strengthen national standards for Canadian patients, the Trudeau government has done the opposite. We are deeply disappointed," said Sandra Azocar, executive director of Alberta's Friends of Medicare. "Canadians need equal access to quality public health care no matter where they live in the country."