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Attn: Assignment Editor

As Health Ministers from Across Canada Meet to Negotiate Health Accord Advocates Set Out Criteria to Measure Success

Toronto – Months of sparring in the media may come to an end this week as Health Ministers from across Canada meet to discuss a new Health Accord. This morning, representatives of the Canadian & Ontario Health Coalitions, Canadian Doctors for Medicare and the Council of Canadians gathered outside the King Edward hotel where Health Ministers from across Canada are meeting. The public interest advocates outlined the criteria required to protect and improve public health care for all Canadians in a new Health Accord and stated that they would measure any proposed deal against these criteria.

“Canadians need our federal and provincial leaders to pull together to make concrete commitments to improve access to care for Canadians in a new Health Accord,” noted Adrienne Silnicki, national coordinator of the Canadian Health Coalition. “An agreement to national standards is essential, including commitments by the provinces to eliminate user fees for patients in private clinics and to expand capacity in the public health care system. We are encouraged by the recent promise to abolish extra user fees for patients in Quebec. The same must be done in other provinces.”

For months, Provincial Premiers and the federal Health Minister have been at odds over funding, with the provinces calling for more and the federal government holding to the reduced funding formula put in place by the Harper government. Health Coalition advocates stressed that both sides need to come to the table with concrete commitments.

“Health care needs do not go down in economic recessions,” noted Natalie Mehra, executive director of the Ontario Health Coalition. “A new Health Accord must include an improved commitment for federal dollars to meet the real health care needs of Canadians or we will see more service cuts and privatization.”

But the provinces are not off the hook either. “Provinces must commit to spending federal funding on improving access and quality in public health care services and not shift them into general revenues while cutting and privatizing services,” she continued.

The Health Coalitions are calling for a new 10-year Accord to include the following:

- A six per cent funding escalator so that federal support for health care will be sufficient to restore fiscal balance and maintain existing programs to meet needs resulting from economic growth, population growth and aging.
- A commitment to uphold and enforce the principles of the Canada Health Act, including the right for patients to access needed medical care on equal terms and conditions without user fees or extra billing. Private clinics are violating the Canada Health Act by charging patients hundreds or even thousands of dollars for diagnostics and surgeries.
- Concrete commitments to improve access across the continuum of care, including reducing wait times in public hospitals, as well as improved access to primary health teams and public home- and continuing care.
- A re-establishment of the federal-provincial-territorial working groups on pharmacare and home/continuing care that were abandoned by the Harper government, with the goal of establishing a national public drug program and a plan to meet the health needs of aging Canadians. The federal government should commit to fifty per cent of the costs of any new programs while the provinces should commit to national standards that establish equity and access for all.

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