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For Immediate Release

Attn: Assignment Editor

Throne Speech: Premiers Should Not Play Partisan Politics with Health Care; Concrete Commitments Needed From Provincial & Federal Governments

Health Coalitions across Canada were pleased with Throne Speech promises to expand public health care to create a universal comprehensive public pharmacare program and to set national standards for long-term care. However, concrete commitments are conspicuously absent.

As reported in the speech, more than 9,000 Canadians have died in the last six months in the worst pandemic our country has faced. Canadians have been powerfully reminded of the value of our public health care system throughout this crisis and have been proud of the lack of crass partisanship and political opportunism in our country's response to date, as compared to the U.S. At the same time, gaps in our continuum of care and the erosion of comprehensive public care were cast into sharp relief during the first wave of the pandemic. These have grown through decades of austerity budgets at the provincial level and have been compounded by the Trudeau government's [cut](#) to the health care funding formula in 2017.

The Coalitions are disturbed by the political opportunism shown by some provincial premiers in response. A number of the provinces that are calling for more federal funding --- with no strings attached -- are at the same time privatizing health care under cover of the pandemic and not providing adequate funding and care standards for their residents. Concrete commitments are needed from both federal and provincial governments to make the needed improvements and Health Coalitions vowed to call out any governments that engage in finger-pointing for partisan benefit against the public interest of Canadians.

Quotes

Alberta: "Seniors' care and pharmacare have been central to Friends of Medicare's advocacy for over 40 years. With the challenges presented by the COVID-19, the major gaps in access to prescription medications and quality seniors' care have been exposed, yet we have seen no action provincially to address these worsening problems or the impacts they have had on Albertan families. We need action on the national level to finally ensure that everyone in this country has access to the care they need and deserve." Sandra Azocar, Executive Director, Friends of Medicare

British Columbia: The BC Health Coalition plans on holding the federal and provincial BC government accountable to their promise to set up firm and concrete national standards for long-term care. We remind the government that public facilities have been proven significantly more effective in the COVID-19 pandemic at protecting seniors. For this reason, we must ensure that all public funding goes directly to providing care and not to subsidize profits. In addition, any national standards must include quality of care standards that advance and protect seniors' human rights. Kathleen Jamieson, Co-Chair of the BC Health Coalition

Manitoba: "While the Throne Speech had positive steps forward, it will mean little to Manitobans and their ability to access public health care unless there is accountability on Premier Pallister and his proclivity toward privatization and the slow erosion of our provincial health care system." Brianne Goertzen, Provincial Director, Manitoba Health Coalition

Nova Scotia: "The Speech from the Throne is surprisingly thin on concrete commitments on health care, considering the fact that it was made in the midst of a pandemic. Nova Scotians need the federal government to

make concrete commitments to public healthcare including universal pharmacare, increases to funding for long-term care, primary care and our province's hospital system. At the same time, need more active leadership from the provincial Liberal government on these issues.” Chris Parsons, Coordinator, Nova Scotia Health Coalition

Ontario: “Canadians want long-term care to be improved as a matter of top urgency. Finally, there seems to be political will at the national level to move on long-term care and pharmacare. The Ford government will find itself on the wrong side of public opinion if they stand in the way or if they continue to engage in the manipulative partisanship on health care that we have seen in recent weeks. Mr. Trudeau and Mr. Ford, it is time to step up with real commitments.” Natalie Mehra, Executive Director, Ontario Health Coalition.

PEI: “The premiers are asking the federal government for money for healthcare with no strings attached. Unfortunately, Canadians can't trust them to use the money for its intended purpose. The federal government needs to have a lever to ensure that money given to the provinces is used to strengthen our public medicare system for the benefit of all Canadians.” Mary Boyd, Chair, PEI Health Coalition

Throne Speech: Key Issues

PPE:

The Throne Speech touts an expansion of domestically produced PPE. [In June](#), the Prime Minister claimed that Canada is close to self-sufficiency in the supply of PPE, however CIHI [data](#) shows that 20 per cent of COVID-19 positive cases across Canada are health care workers, and in the largest long-term care outbreak currently in Canada, front-line staff providing care for COVID-positive residents [still have not had access to N95 masks](#). The SARS Commission [recommended](#) the precautionary principle when dealing with infectious diseases such as coronaviruses. The federal government and Public Health Canada must do much more to uphold the precautionary principle, giving access to a higher grade of protection including N95 masks for those providing care to people infected with the virus.

National Standards for Long-Term Care:

The Throne Speech commits the federal government to working with the provinces to forge new national standards for long-term care but did not make any suggestion as to what those standards might be. Across Canada, health advocates are calling for an end to for-profit long-term care. In the first wave of the pandemic, for-profit long-term care homes had far higher rates of death than public and non-profit homes. In addition, public health advocates are calling for an average minimum direct care standard of 4-hours or more per resident per day to improve woefully inadequate care levels. The federal government must lead on these issues and not wait for provinces, some of which have close connections to the for-profit long-term care industry that has a vested interest in resisting increased regulation and enforcement. Provincial premiers must make firm commitments to improve direct care levels in long-term care, support public non-profit care, and set quality of care standards that respect the dignity of seniors.

Pharmacare:

The Throne Speech included a federal commitment to creating a comprehensive universal public pharmacare program and establishing a national drug formulary. The health and financial challenges presented by COVID-19 have taken a toll on Canadian families. As access to medications has become increasingly precarious, the need for universal pharmacare has become all the more urgent. There is no province that has adequate access to medications, despite recent statements by some premiers. These are important and long overdue steps, and so must be immediately implemented.

Other key issues:

Also missing from the Throne Speech was any commitment to improve federal health transfers and uphold the Canada Health Act's prohibitions on extra-billing and user fees for patients. Some provinces are enabling for-profit clinics to openly charge patients needing health care hundreds or even thousands of dollars in contravention of the Act. Private clinics, and provinces that are abetting them, must be stopped from undermining the core tenets of Public Medicare. Health coalitions were also disappointed that lip service was paid but meaningful steps

omitted for access to family doctors and primary care, and there was no coherent plan to address Canada's ongoing overdose crisis, which has only worsened with the isolation brought on by COVID-19.