



END CHILD & FAMILY POVERTY IN CANADA

MEDIA RELEASE

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Premiers' plan shuffles deck chairs on the Titanic while ignoring the iceberg

The Premiers new plan to address the challenges in our health care system, shuffles the deck chairs on the Titanic while ignoring the iceberg of poverty and inequality, comments anti-poverty groups and physicians concerned with long-term prevention of illness. Unfortunately, the Federal government has abdicated its role in helping provinces and territories to avoid this iceberg by pretending that it does not exist.

The cross-provincial effort to improve the delivery of health care services is laudable, but there is more to the health than health care services. To control the growth of health care expenditures and improve the health of Canadians, we have to tackle poverty and income inequality, which are key determinants of health for all of us.

The report, *From Innovation to Action: The First Report of the Health Care Innovation Working Group*, released at the Council of the Federation meeting yesterday focuses on how to fix the existing system while ignoring the root causes of illness that are pushing up health care costs.

“For the health of all Canadians and the health of the economy, the Provinces need to strengthen their poverty reduction strategies and the Federal government needs to adopt its own comprehensive and coordinated plan. Income is a key determinant of a person’s health. The higher one’s position on the income ladder, the more likely one is to live in good health. Income inequality, on the other hand, impairs health and increases premature mortality. Simply, all Canadians will benefit from less poverty and inequality,” added Sid Frankel, Associate Professor, University of Manitoba Faculty of Social Work.

According to Dr. Michael Rachlis, health care analyst and Associate Professor, University of Toronto, “Poverty accounts for at least 20% of our health care costs. If we can reduce poverty substantially and increase the quality of life for more people, we will reduce some health care expenditures and prevent new costs in the future.”

Fifty years ago, Tommy Douglas and the Saskatchewan government promoted a full medicare system that would prevent illness and keep people well. In the second stage of medicare, ‘pharmacare for all’ was to be a key method of delivering services. The logic and value of such an approach to providing health care is still relevant today, especially when too many low-income people have no access to affordable medications and often become ill as a result.

The Premiers should note that no one remembers the crew of the Titanic for making service more efficient by re-organizing deck chairs, but rather for causing a disaster by ignoring reality. They should collectively try to avoid this fate.

Campaign 2000 is a non-partisan cross Canada coalition of over 120 organizations committed to ending child & family poverty in Canada. www.campaign2000.ca

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