



30 Health Groups Respond to Federal Budget 2004

25 March 2004 (Ottawa): In responding to Tuesday’s federal budget, members of the Health Action Lobby (HEAL) were pleased with the federal government’s intent, in principle, to focus on “predictable” and “sustainable” funding for health, as well as its commitment to an accountable health system. For many years, HEAL has been urging governments to respond to its call for an *Accountable* health system, that has *Sustainable, Adequate* and *Predictable* funding - an “A.S.A.P.” approach – across the continuum of care. HEAL welcomes the modest steps towards this end that are evidenced in today’s budget.

In particular, the government’s attempts to restore some of Canada’s lost capacity around public health initiatives was viewed positively, and the recognition of a greater need for diagnostic and medical equipment was also applauded. As well, Pamela Fralick, Co-Chair of HEAL observed “The importance of the government’s apparent desire to “fight *for* medicare, not *over* medicare”, in terms of its relations with the provinces and territories cannot be overstated. Canadians, too, are tired of the ‘blame game’.

However, HEAL remains concerned with significant gaps and limitations in this budget:

- **Base Funding:** the \$2 billion provided to the provinces and territories has not been added to base funding,
- **Human Resources:** there remains a lack of leadership and targeted funds for a coordinated approach to human resource issues, central to the sustainability of the health system,
- **Home Care:** follow-up to earlier commitments to the “basket” of home care services (made in the 2003 budget and the First Minister's Accord on Health Care Reform) is missing,
- **Mental Health:** a leading threat to the overall health of Canadians, mental health has not been mentioned, and
- **Promotion and Prevention:** the important role of health promotion and prevention in a continuum of care model, although identified as a priority in the Speech from the Throne, has been largely ignored in the budget, other than disease prevention issues under public health.

Fralick concluded, “HEAL members have an expectation of significant leadership from the federal government in *all* health matters, including those noted above. The budget notes that Canadians’ number one concern is health. While a step in the right direction, this budget does not reflect that priority.”

HEAL was formed in 1991 by a group of associations and organizations dedicated to protecting and strengthening Canada’s health system. Today, its 30 member organizations represent more than half a million health professionals and consumers.

For further information contact:

Pamela C. Fralick, Co-Chair, HEAL
Chief Executive Officer, Canadian
Physiotherapy Association
(416) 932-1888, ext. 214
pfralick@physiotherapy.ca