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CPA Calls On Political Leaders To Meet Health Accord Deadlines

September 15, 2005 -- The Canadian Physiotherapy Association joined organizations representing doctors, nurses, health care facilities and agencies and others working within the system in calling on political leaders to meet the deadlines set forth in last year's First Ministers Health Plan.

In a joint event marking the one-year anniversary of the accord, Pamela Fralick, CEO of the Canadian Physiotherapy Association and Chair of the Health Action Lobby (HEAL) stood with Canadian Medical Association President Dr. Ruth Collins-Nakai, Sharon Sholzberg-Gray, President of the Canadian Health Care Association, Dr. Deborah Tamlyn, President of the Canadian Nurses Association and Dr. Jeff Poston, Executive Director of the Canadian Pharmacists Association in requesting Canada's political leaders do everything possible to fulfill the commitments spelled out in the accord.

An Ipsos-Reid poll conducted for the Canadian Medical Association (CMA) and the Canadian Nurses Association (CNA) shows that while Canadians believe the September 2004 First Ministers Health Plan can help rebuild the health care system; many fear governments will not meet their deadlines for action. On the eve of the first anniversary of the plan, most Canadians (54 per cent) polled said they are less optimistic about the future of health care services in their community than they were one year ago.

"With the exception of the recent appointment of wait time advisor Dr. Brian Postl and some other activities, Canada's health care providers and managers seem to be on the outside looking in," said Pamela Fralick, President of HEAL. "One year into the deal we wonder what happened to the early, ongoing and meaningful engagement promised between political leaders and health care professionals."

"Last year at this time the First Ministers committed to produce wait time benchmarks and targets to increase the number of health professionals working in the system," said CMA President, Dr. Ruth Collins-Nakai. "This led Canadians to believe that we had turned the corner on health; now Canadians are worried their leaders have turned the page on health before fulfilling the commitments spelled out in the accord."

Sharon Sholzberg-Gray, CHA President and CEO, said while Canadians are willing to invest in the health system, in return they expect tangible results, publicly reported information about health outcomes and costs, clear lines of accountability and above all, access to timely and quality health care. "We are anxious to work with governments to achieve our common objectives," she added, "and we intend to hold their feet to the fire."

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Two key planks in the First Ministers' plan were the establishment of benchmarks for medically acceptable wait times for treatments for cancer and heart ailments, diagnostic imaging, joint replacements and sight restoration, and comparable indicators of access to health care professionals, by December 31, 2005.

"Last September, governments reassured Canadians that strengthening the health system was a priority," said Dr. Deborah Tamlyn, CNA President. "Health professionals like individual Canadians, are looking for evidence of government action on that promise.

While three out of four Canadians agree that wait times benchmarks are a good idea, only a third (33 per cent) are confident that the federal government and their provincial/territorial government will live up to their promise to establish benchmarks by December 2005.

The 10-year plan included commitments to establish targets for the training, recruitment and retention of health professionals by December 31, 2005 and pledged to develop and implement a national pharmaceutical strategy by June 30 2006, among other strategies.

"Given the ongoing growth in drug costs, concerns about drug safety and gaps in care, the need for a National Pharmaceutical Strategy is vitally important," added Dr. Jeff Poston, Executive Director of the CPhA. "Yet to date, the extent to which we have seen effective consultation with health care providers has been limited and overall progress appears slow."

Just as Canadians are not confident that wait time benchmarks will be set, only one in three Canadians (34 per cent) is confident that governments will live up to the commitment to establish targets for health professionals by the deadline.

Most Canadians (62 per cent) also agree the federal government should withhold some (41 per cent) or all (21 per cent) of the increased health funding not yet transferred to the provinces/territories that do not meet the commitments until they are met. Just one out of three Canadians (34 per cent) agrees that increased funding should not be withheld and that the provinces/territories should be given an extension to meet those commitments.

You can access the Ipsos-Reid poll at cma.ca