

SUBMISSION TO THE HOUSE OF COMMONS STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

PRE-BUDGET CONSULTATIONS 2005

Prepared by the Canadian Nurses Association

September 6, 2005

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Submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance Pre-Budget Consultations 2005

By Canadian Nurses Association

In its invitation, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance stated:

“A number of factors influence a nation’s productivity performance, and a variety of measures might be implemented to enhance that performance: actions to increase the ability and willingness of businesses to engage in research and development and to adopt the best machinery and equipment for their employees, actions to encourage citizens to engage in work rather than leisure and to invest in lifelong learning, and actions to ensure physical infrastructure in our communities that enables high levels of productivity growth and that makes our communities desirable places in which citizens want to live and work.”

The Canadian Nurses Association (CNA) agrees with this statement. Further, CNA draws to the committee’s attention a statement from the multinational corporation Toyota, which recently chose to locate a new plant in Canada rather than in the United States because of our national health system.¹

CNA believes that our productivity as a country and as individuals benefits from the presence of a publicly funded health system. This brief builds on the relationship between the health system and productivity. It proposes recommendations to strengthen the health system and thereby, enhance our prosperity. The recommendations fall into three themes:

1. Building capacity to innovate
2. Facilitating access to learning
3. Assuring security by preventing disease outbreaks and natural disasters

¹ Paul Krugman, “Toyota, Moving Northward,” *The New York Times*, July 25, 2005.

Building Capacity to Innovate

“The reality is this: our success as a nation depends on our ability to compete and to sustain ongoing advances in our economic performance. Without it, our progressive society wilts on the vine of affordability. Health care, pensions, liveable cities, the environment, education, childcare...without a powerful economic engine to carry the freight, those cherished features of our Canadian society turn into utopian dreams.”²

Governments have stimulated new knowledge development in the health sector through research funding and investments in pilot projects. In the 2004 10-year plan to strengthen health care, the federal government committed to supporting health innovation. CNA recommends that such support be targeted to moving research findings from the bench to the bedside.

Specifically, CNA recommends that the federal government invest in the following:

- 1. Infrastructure in hospitals and community facilities (public health clinics, long-term care facilities, home care programs) to implement new research findings and technologies.**

Like the Association of Canadian Academic Healthcare Organizations, CNA notes that hospitals and community facilities are leaders of innovation and serve a unique role in the system, including training the next generation of health professionals. The precedent for direct federal government expenditure in health-care facilities was established in the 1950s.

- 2. Programs to expand the capacity of health professionals to access new research.**

Such programs could include training on how to interpret, analyze and apply research findings. They could also include links to a web-based repository of health research results. The programs could be delivered through federal government sponsored training.

Facilitating Access to Learning

Human capital is a key element of innovation in the health sector. In September 2004, the federal government agreed with provincial and territorial governments that human resources (HR) planning is fundamental to the sustainability of the health system. There are clear roles for the federal government in HR planning, particularly with regard to learning. Based on surveys of Canadian nurses, we know that providing access to professional development and lifelong learning is a prerequisite to retaining nurses as part of the human capital in the health sector.

² The Honourable David L. Emerson, Minister of Industry, Address to the Regina and Saskatoon Chambers of Commerce, Regina / Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, August 23, 2005.

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1. For immigrants who want to work within the health system, accelerate the assessment and integration of foreign educated applicants by establishing the infrastructure to support educational upgrading, language training and social and cultural integration activities. The infrastructure would connect employers, governments, educators and professional associations. This infrastructure would extend to the federal *Going to Canada* website.
 2. Develop a strategy that reduces the attractiveness of U. S.-based employment opportunities. This strategy must include lifelong learning supports.
 3. Establish simulation laboratories to enhance the clinical knowledge of health professionals.
 4. Fund a return of services (ROS) program in areas of federal jurisdiction (First Nations communities, the Department of National Defence and Correctional Service Canada). ROS programs are in place in many provinces and territories. The payback of the ROS programs is to reduce the emigration of health professionals.
 5. Expand investments in interdisciplinary education. Health Canada already provides support for interdisciplinary education. Changing the way we educate health providers is key to ensuring that they have the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes to work effectively in the evolving health system.

Assuring Security by Preventing Disease Outbreaks and Natural Disasters

The 2003 National Advisory Committee on SARS and Public Health identified a gap in training opportunities for those who wish to pursue careers in public health. The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) has already developed web-based modules on public health and is examining the possibility of expanding current masters in public health programs across the country. CNA believes that the federal government can and must play a role in ensuring the country is prepared to manage natural disasters and to avoid disease outbreaks.

In light of devastating natural disasters (hurricane Katrina, tsunamis, etc.) and health disasters (SARS, avian flu, etc.), the federal government can lead efforts to establish a secure and safe climate to ensure the sustainability of the health system. Throughout its history, Canada has recognized the importance of communication systems to its growth. This experience is also true for the health system. When there is no formal mechanism to share information or when there is inconsistent and unclear messaging, health professionals are unable to deliver necessary health services, to prevent the spread of disease. In a post-SARS world, extending the information highway to health professionals in communities across Canada is fundamentally important.

CNA recommends that the federal government do the following:

1. Expand training opportunities in public health. This effort could include:
 - a. capital and infrastructure funding to develop a master's in public health program;
 - b. tuition support for health professionals interested in maintaining up-to-date knowledge of disease outbreak management and public health issues;

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- c. development and promotion of web-based modules in public health, to expand those currently offered by PHAC;
 - d. broadband infrastructure in rural/remote areas to improve access by health professionals serving these communities to new research and technology developments; and
 - e. support through bursaries of student work terms in community health centres.
 2. Lead the creation of a communication system to ensure all stakeholders have timely access to information on disease outbreaks and emergencies.
 3. Involve health professionals in the development of an emergency preparedness strategy.



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