

**Building a
stronger, viable,
publicly funded,
not-for-profit
health system**

September 2004



CANADIAN NURSES ASSOCIATION
ASSOCIATION DES INFIRMIÈRES ET INFIRMIERS DU CANADA

About the Canadian Nurses Association

Founded in 1908, the Canadian Nurses Association (CNA) is a federation of 11 provincial and territorial nursing associations and colleges in Canada, representing over 120,000 registered nurses. CNA's mandate is to contribute to the health of Canadians by advancing the quality of nursing in the interest of the public.

CNA believes that all Canadians should have equitable access to the health services they need. Equitable access requires:

- a national publicly funded, not-for-profit health system;
- an adequate supply of health professionals; and
- a health system that encompasses treatment of all illness and disease, health promotion, disease prevention and emergency preparedness, with the goal of promoting and improving the health of Canadians.

CNA believes that the First Ministers' Meeting scheduled for the week of September 13 will provide an opportunity for the first ministers to show true leadership and restore the confidence of Canadians in our publicly funded, not-for-profit health system.

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Building a stronger, viable, publicly funded, not-for-profit health system through innovation, knowledge and action

Comprehensive, integrated and holistic approach to health care

Nurses support a publicly funded, not-for-profit health system that has a comprehensive, integrated and holistic approach to health care.

Health system renewal must incorporate measures to create an integrated system that provides services across the continuum of care – from the timely treatment of acute conditions and chronic diseases to a pharmacare program to home care. Health promotion and prevention must become one of the cornerstones of the health system with action focused on strengthening the public health infrastructure.

- ***Primary health care:*** CNA believes that adopting the principles of primary health care would enhance the Canadian health system. Primary health care focuses on health promotion and prevention and promotes the adoption of collaborative teams where, with the client at the centre of decision-making, nurses and nurse practitioners work alongside physicians, nutritionists and other members of health care teams to provide accessible and timely health services – the right provider at the right time providing the right services.
- ***Improve the health of Aboriginal Canadians:*** Health promotion and prevention initiatives directed to First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities must be a priority (as described in the preceding section under primary health care). Nurses can play a pivotal role in addressing the health demands in these communities. CNA is calling for funds to support a cooperative project with Aboriginal Canadians to examine how nurses can provide clinical leadership in these communities and promote better health.
- ***Public health:*** Public health priorities must be an integral part of the services provided under the *Canada Health Act*. Public health promotes healthy lifestyles and healthy communities, protects people from injuries and disease, contains the spread of communicable diseases and tracks or monitors the health status of Canadians. Public health focuses on the health, not illness, of populations and groups within these populations.
- ***Home care:*** Home care is an integral element to the continuum of care. A comprehensive home care program should provide followup support following hospitalization and in-home support for medical conditions that can be managed from home, allowing acute care facilities to deal with more acute situations. Home care is a strategy that can reduce hospital admissions by facilitating early release and managing chronic diseases outside the acute care facilities.
- ***Pharmacare:*** Care treatment plans involve the administration of drugs. CNA favours a pharmacare program that is integral to a comprehensive, integrated health care system. There is a need to address pharmaceutical costs for Canadians who find themselves financially challenged to meet drug needs, whether it be due to the lack of insurance, the lack of employment or exceptionally high drug costs coupled with low income.

The sustainability of the health system rests upon a vibrant nursing workforce

Nurses believe that the sustainability of the health system rests upon a vibrant nursing workforce. Nurses believe that we must invest in the people who provide health care services.

We need to think beyond the bricks and mortar, machines and equipment – it takes people to care for people. An investment in human capital will reap dividends in the long term by addressing the current issues of the shortage of health care professionals, poor working environments, and the need to retain existing health care workers.

CNA believes that we need to take the following actions:

- ***Invest in better access by integrating the nurse practitioner:*** A multi-year commitment is needed to support the integration of the nurse practitioner role in the community, primary health care and public health. This initiative would include a multi-year commitment to support their education and to reach the goal of graduating 10,000 nurse practitioners;

- ***Invest in knowledge:*** Creating an evidence-based decision-making climate in the health system means investing in knowledge development and knowledge transfer. CNA is calling for 2,500 new seats for master prepared students, 300 new doctoral seats and graduate fellowships to develop this expertise. Additionally, we need the continuation of multi-year commitments for clinical and system research and increased dedicated funding for nursing research.
- ***Invest in younger nurses:*** Nurses are strongly motivated by relationships with supervisors, job feedback and ties to the leadership of nurse mentors and managers. Those conditions are important to nurses at different phases of their careers, but they are fundamental to novice nurses.

Studies of nurses who are within five years of graduating indicate that significant numbers intend to leave their jobs or leave nursing altogether. Due to budgetary cuts, many first-line management positions have been eliminated, or managers have been forced to take on a wide span of control, handicapping their ability to effectively supervise staff. Some 5,500 Canadian nursing management positions were eliminated between 1994 and 2000. For instance, the number of first-line managers should be sufficient to allow reasonable levels of contact with nurses in the setting. The first-line manager should be an experienced nurse with strong leadership abilities.

- ***Invest in the future:*** Along with the development of a pan-Canadian health human resources strategy, we need a multi-year commitment for the education of new RNs in all Canadian nursing schools to meet future demands.
- ***Invest in better working conditions:*** The current working environments for health professionals, in many instances, does not promote good patient outcomes. An inadequate supply of RNs, high absenteeism and overtime rates, as well as poor decisions on staffing mixes are threatening patient safety. Investments must be made to improve the acute care infrastructure and to provide the necessary number of full-time, permanent positions for RNs.

Adequate funding and innovation required

Nurses believe that the sustainability of the health system requires adequate funding and incentives to support innovative solutions. Canadians expect significant return on investments made in the health system. Therefore, accountability and regular reporting must be an integral component of health system renewal.

- ***Increase the current tax base transfer:*** CNA recommends that the \$2 billion one-time commitment made in 2003, which has been carried forward to this fiscal year, together with the additional \$1 billion promised for this fiscal year in the Liberal election platform be added to the base of the Canadian Health Transfer. Although needed to shore up the present gap in funding, one-time payments will not address concerns Canadians have expressed about access to health services, including rising wait times for key services.
- ***Keep pace with economic growth and rising demands:*** Federal health funding must keep pace with economic growth and rising health care needs through a predictable escalator (promised by the Liberals in their election platform). The current escalator of 2.8 per cent is not enough to reduce wait times or improve access.
- ***Recognize the effectiveness and relevance of other modes of care within the publicly funded system:*** Defining the structure of the system and its components must be a continuous and iterative process. Structures should change based on the achievement of objectives. They should change as a result of research findings and the evaluation of clinical practice. They should change to address population health trends, mental health and public health issues. Nurses play an important role in the continuous improvement of the health care system to ensure clients receive high quality care and the system remains robust.
- ***Promote innovation through incentives:*** Create an incentive fund to encourage provinces, territories and facilities to improve services by rewarding innovative approaches that lead to better access and reduced wait times.
- ***Promote accountability through regular reporting:*** Support the national Health Council in its efforts to ensure regular reporting on health system performance.

