Campaign 2008

CNA’s Four Issues for the Election

http://election.cna-aiic.ca
In every federal election over the past 100 years, the Canadian Nurses Association (CNA) has identified several issues as priorities for political action. As your professional association, we focus on these issues when engaging with the political parties during election campaigns. Our efforts at the national level are strengthened by your engagement with political candidates in your constituency.

Prepare yourself!

There are practical steps you can take during the election to campaign for a sustainable health system and for better health for all of us. More information on how to advocate for nursing is available at http://election.cna-aiic.ca.

During the 2008 election campaign, CNA will focus on practical solutions to four issues that are critical to health and health care in Canada:

1. **Sustaining** Canada’s publicly funded, not-for-profit health system through innovation and technology
2. **Ensuring** safe, effective and affordable prescription drugs for all Canadians
3. **Training, recruiting** and effectively deploying health professionals
4. **Reducing** threats to health, particularly from environmental risks

CNA will work with the leaders and national staff of each of the political parties to make sure these four issues are on their policy agenda. These issues will also play themselves out in different and important ways in each of the 308 constituencies across the country. Your participation during the election campaign will guarantee that political candidates become aware of the relevance of the four issues – and nursing’s proposed solutions – in their constituency.

All political candidates are interested in ideas that voters support. Nurses can engage candidates to help them understand that it makes political sense to deal with health issues and to support the solutions offered by Canada’s nurses.
Here is how the four issues connect to the work of the federal government (no matter which party is in power):

- The federal government has articulated a national science and technology agenda. CNA’s solutions involve a significant role for technology innovation in addressing the challenges in our health system.
- The federal government contributes to the National Pharmaceuticals Strategy through funding to Canada Health Infoway and the Canadian Optimal Prescribing and Utilization Service, as well as drug regulation, among others.
- The federal government is responsible for workplace learning and knowledge development. Our solutions address this responsibility.
- The federal government has legislative responsibility for managing threats to the environment (Canadian Environmental Protection Act), including threats that affect human health.

Sustaining Canada’s publicly funded, not-for-profit health system

Main Message
Although our health-care system is facing many challenges – the best-known are access to care and wait times – there are also many solutions, and these solutions do not require moving to private health care or to a two-tier system. These solutions involve innovation and an expanded use of technology. Many new technologies offer significant improvements in efficiency, as proven in pilot projects, but they have not been marketed and implemented nationally.

The Ask
CNA wants your support for the federal government to invest and provide leadership in two areas:

1. A national strategy to improve innovation and productivity in the health sector
2. Accelerated implementation of electronic health records and other information and communications technology to improve access to health services

The Facts
- When we consider the spending of other nations, there is no reason to believe that Canada’s expenditures on health are out of control. Canada spent 10% of GDP on health in 2006, ranking 8th among 30 countries in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The U.S. spent 15.3% of GDP on health in 2006.
- However, we need to target our investments in health system more strategically.
- Numerous projects in hospitals and health facilities across the country have shown the benefits of e-health and other technologies as well as re-engineered work processes.
- Innovative approaches to front-line care have demonstrated the effectiveness of interprofessional health-care teams.
- Anthony Fell, chairman of RBC Capital Markets, observes that the health sector is 25 to 30 years behind the banking industry in its adoption of information and communications technology.
- Establishing electronic health records across the country may be able to save the system $48 billion over 20 years through reductions in adverse drug events alone, and another $14 billion could be saved over the same period by reducing duplicate and unnecessary tests.
- It will cost $10 billion over 10 years to create electronic health records for all Canadians. So far, the federal government has only invested $1.5 billion.

Getting the message right
For each of the four issues, CNA wants politicians to support innovation that makes our health system more effective. Action on CNA’s proposed solutions falls within the responsibilities of the federal government (for information on who’s responsible for what, go to http://election.cna-aiic.ca). The following messages are designed for use with decision-makers in the national political parties and with candidates for federal office.

Privatization of the health system is not the panacea. Research comparing the quality of health services and outcomes shows that publicly funded health services have better results than do privately owned facilities.

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Ensuring safe, effective and affordable prescription drugs for all Canadians

Main Message
Every Canadian should have timely access to safe and effective prescription drugs, and no Canadian should be deprived of needed prescription drugs because they are unable to pay.

The Ask
CNA wants the federal government to fulfill its commitment in the 2004 Health Accord to implement a national pharmaceutical strategy. Will you accelerate efforts to implement all nine elements of the national pharmaceutical strategy?

The Facts
- Spending on prescription drugs neared $27 billion in 2007. It has been estimated that 20% of Canadians are underinsured or uninsured against drug expenditures.  
- In 2004, the prime minister and all of the provincial and territorial premiers, known as the “First Ministers,” agreed that no Canadian should suffer undue financial hardship for needed drug therapy. 
- The First Ministers agreed to take measures, by the end of 2005/06, to ensure that all Canadians, wherever they live, have reasonable access to catastrophic drug coverage. 
- The First Ministers also agreed to further collaborate to promote optimal drug use, best practices in drug prescription and better management of the costs of all drugs, including generic drugs, to ensure that drugs are safe, effective and accessible in a timely and cost-effective fashion. 
- In its 2008 annual report to Canadians, the Health Council of Canada remarked on the unacceptable progress in creating the national pharmaceutical strategy that was promised in 2004.

Training, recruiting and effectively deploying health professionals

Main Message
Canada is failing to train, retain and effectively deploy health professionals. Canada must invest more in employee training. The projected RN shortage is 113,000 by 2016.

The Ask
CNA wants the federal government to support initiatives in the following two areas.

1. The development of new skills. Will you endorse measures, including the use of revenues collected for employment insurance, that directly reward Canadian workers and employers for investing in skills development?
2. Increased enrolment opportunities in health sciences education. Will you support programs that augment the enrolment capacity of educational institutions to match the recruitment needs of the federal government for nurses – about 1,600 registered nurses new hires will be needed by the federal government over the next ten years – as well as other health professionals?

The Facts
- In 1996 Canadian employers invested, on average, $842 in training per employee, but in 2006 that amount had fallen to only $699 (in 1996 dollars).
- Health-care organizations spend 1.27% of their payroll on learning and development, whereas organizations from other sectors spend 1.80%.
- It is critical that workers continually enhance their skills for Canada to compete successfully on the world stage. Canada’s employers, however, are not keeping pace with other OECD countries in the amount of training they provide to their workers.
- A recent report from Statistics Canada reveals that 77% of workers in health occupations reported improved job performance as a result of continuing education.
- According to the 2006 World Health Report, continuing education is a significant factor influencing the retention of health professionals, including nurses.

Nursing Facts
In 2006, there were 252,948 registered nurses (RNs) employed in nursing in Canada.

55% of RNs held full-time nursing positions.
13% of RNs had more than one employer in nursing.
For every RN who was 35 years or younger, there were 1.9 RNs who were 50 or older.
One in every five RNs in Canada is 55 years of age or older.
35% of nurses working in oncology and 45% of nurses working in operating rooms will retire in the next five years.
The projected RN shortage is 113,000 by 2016.

References:
Canadian Institute for Health Information, RN Database. 2006

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Reducing threats to health, particularly from environmental risks

Main Message

Environmental risks, including exposure to harmful contaminants, are damaging the health of Canadians and causing deaths. Harmful contaminants in our air, water and food must be reduced.

The Ask

Will you support legislative action to reduce and eliminate risks in the environment that threaten human health? In particular, CNA wants you to:

1. Support bringing back Canada’s Clean Air Act as modified by the House of Commons Legislative Committee on Bill C-30 in 2007.

2. Support necessary changes to the Environmental Protection Act when it is amended.

The Facts

• A Listeria outbreak from a breach in food safety has been linked to 13 deaths in Canada so far this year.19

• Every year, 5,900 deaths across eight major Canadian cities can be attributed to air pollution.20

• About 2.7 million Canadian children and adults have asthma; poor air quality contributes to the development of this disease.21

• There were 1,481 probable or confirmed cases of West Nile virus infection in Canada in 2003; by 2007, there were 2,215 such cases.22 Climate change can influence the number and geographic distribution of vector-borne diseases and increase the length of the transmission season. West Nile virus infections are expected to increase in response to global warming.23

• Extreme weather events will become more common with increasing changes in the climate, and they can endanger health. For example, floods can result in contaminated drinking water supplies, which in turn can lead to outbreaks of parasitic and bacterial disease such as diarrhoea.24

Nurses’ credibility and strength in numbers

In Canada there are some 270,000 registered nurses. Public opinion polls confirm that Canadians see nurses as one of the most trusted sources of information and help. Politicians, on the other hand, have a low trust rating with the public.

These four main messages are worth repeating: the more they are repeated, the more effective they will be. For political candidates to absorb the messages, you will need to use local examples – anecdotes and stories that demonstrate how a particular issue is hampering the health of voters in their constituency or how CNA’s solutions will benefit those same voters.


2 Ibid.


8 Ibid.


11 Ibid.


14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.


18 First Nations and Inuit Health Branch officials, personal communication, 2008.


24 Ibid.
Nurses Do Make a Difference

Speak up and vote on October 14 for the candidate and party who will best work to sustain the health system and improve the health of Canadians.

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