



HOUSE OF COMMONS STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE  
OPENING REMARKS BY DR. KAREN COHEN, CO-CHAIR, HEALTH ACTION LOBBY  
AND Ms. PAMELA FRALICK, PAST CO-CHAIR, HEALTH ACTION LOBBY  
OCTOBER 28, 2009

Good afternoon, my name is Dr. Karen Cohen and I am the co-Chair of the Health Action Lobby. I am also the Executive Director of the Canadian Psychological Association. I am joined by Ms. Pamela Fralick, who is the past Co-Chair of HEAL, and is the President & CEO of the Canadian Healthcare Association.

The Health Action Lobby (HEAL) is a coalition of 38 national health and consumer associations and organizations dedicated to protecting and strengthening Canada's health system. It represents more than half a million providers and consumers of health services in Canada. HEAL was established in 1991 with a view to exchanging knowledge, developing consensus and providing advice to government and others on pan-Canadian health policy issues.

In the spirit of contributing to the Standing Committee's deliberations leading to Budget 2010, HEAL welcomes the opportunity to propose one program spending measure by the federal government that can make a significant difference when it comes to improving the flexibility, adaptability and performance of the health system.

Investment in health is key to a prosperous and sustainable future for Canadians. The health of Canadians depends in no small measure on an adequate and sustained supply of health service providers so that Canadians will have timely access to care in times of need.

This is why HEAL is recommending that the federal government establish a five-year *National Health Human Resource Infrastructure Fund (NHRIF)* valued at \$1.0 Billion. It is important to note that the Fund is time-limited, issue-specific and strategically targeted in nature.

The *National Health Human Resource Infrastructure Fund* is designed to support and complement the health human resource priorities of the provinces and territories by assisting them in increasing the supply of health care providers to address current and longer-term challenges related to timely access to a range of health services.

HEAL strongly believes that improved access to health and health service plays a crucial role in Canada's future prosperity and quality of life. Accessible service is service that is adequately resourced. Investment in human capital development through the *National Health Human*

***Resource Infrastructure Fund*** is a critical step towards improving the access to health and health service that Canadians need.

The recommendation to create the ***National Health Human Resource Infrastructure Fund*** is driven by three unequivocal trends.

First, the health needs of Canadians are becoming more complex as a result of chronic disease and an aging demographic.

Second, like the general population, health providers themselves are aging, with several of our health professions with an average age over 45 years. They are reaching retirement and/or leaving the profession in numbers greater than they are being replaced.

Third, the foregoing trends are not unique to Canada – resulting in an intensified global competition to attract and retain experienced and specialized health care professionals.

The ***National Health Human Resource Infrastructure Fund*** takes on these trends by targeting the essential and inter-related elements necessary to train and develop additional health care professionals and leaders. These include:

1. Funding for special initiatives to offset the direct costs of training providers and developing leaders – such as the costs of recruiting and supporting more community-based teachers and mentors.
2. The indirect or infrastructure costs associated with the educational enterprise (e.g., physical plant (housekeeping, maintenance); support for departments (information systems, library resources, occupational health, etc.); education offices, and the materials and equipment necessary for clinical practice and practical training.
3. An overall data management system that will allow us to specify, track, forecast and cost health human resource requirements in the face of an evolving demand for health services. An evolving needs based health system should direct, and be directed by, needs for health human resource

The first two elements are required to create additional education and training positions. Practical training depends upon sustained and resourced engagement of community-based teachers, supervisors and mentors.

The third element of HEAL's proposal – data management capacity, is essential if we are to more clearly understand the causes of the boom–bust cycle of health workforce supply and demand in Canada; demonstrate accountability and effective use of resources; engage in future evidence-informed practices and decision making and respond to Canada's evolving health needs. For example we do not presently know the detailed costs of educating and training the full range of health professionals in Canada nor of teaching and supporting work collaboratively in the service of best health practice.

In closing, the *National Health Human Resource Infrastructure Fund* would allow the federal government to contribute in a complementary pan-Canadian fashion to increase the supply of health professionals while giving the provinces and territories maximum flexibility in terms of developing a needs-based plan of action.

It could also accelerate the introduction of new models of care by ensuring sufficient opportunities to inculcate leading practices in a future generation of clinicians; and increase the availability of data and analytical capacity for accountability, planning, and future decision-making purposes.

In 2007, Canada spent \$160B on health. It is estimated that between 60 and 80 cents of every health care dollar in Canada is spent on health human resources. In other words, of the \$160Billion, \$96 to \$128Billion was invested in HHR. This investment underscores the central role that health professionals assume within a health care system. The magnitude of the role and of the investment demands that we undertake health human resource planning thoughtfully, responsively and accountably.

Understanding that the future responsiveness of the health system in terms of providing quality health and health care services in a timely fashion largely depends on the availability of health providers, we are of the view that now is the time for the federal government – in close consultation and collaboration with the provinces and territories and providers – to establish a *National Health Human Resources Infrastructure Fund*.

Thank you