

# A National Health Council

## Fact Sheets on Key Health Care Issues

### Meeting the need for accountability and transparency

During its cross-country hearings, the Commission on the Future of Health Care in Canada heard consistently that inter-governmental conflict and mistrust have become serious barriers to the smooth functioning and sustainability of medicare.

In response, the Commission recommended that a national health council be established to facilitate co-operation and provide national leadership in



achieving the best health outcomes possible. Rather than being simply another advisory body, the council was intended to function as a mechanism for analysis and

assessment of the health care system as a whole, and for “facilitating public input on critical health issues.”

As envisioned by the Commission, the immediate priorities of the council should be to:

- establish common indicators and measure the performance of the health care system, and prepare an annual performance report to Canadians;
- collect information and report publicly on efforts to improve quality, access and outcomes;

- conduct independent evaluations on the cost and effectiveness of health technologies.

The Commission also outlined the following medium- and longer-term priorities for the Council:

- facilitating primary health care reform;
- providing advice and co-ordination related to the supply, distribution and changing roles of health care providers;
- assisting in the resolution of disputes under the *Canada Health Act*.

In February 2003, the prime minister, premiers and territorial leaders met to work on an action plan for health system renewal. While they did discuss the national health council recommendation, the Accord they reached would create a council with a much narrower mandate.

**“We urge you to recommend a solution to the federal - provincial - territorial impasse...”**

**Ecumenical Health Care Network  
Submission to the Romanow Commission  
May 2002**

In the Accord, they “... agree to establish a Health Council to monitor and make annual public reports on the implementation of the Accord, particularly its accountability and transparency provisions.”

The Ecumenical Health Care Network (EHCN) welcomes the establishment of a Health Council, but is concerned that the council’s terms of reference may not achieve the broader public accountability that is essential for strengthening and enhancing Canada’s public health care system.

The EHCN recommends the following principles for developing an effective Health Council.

1. Mandate:

To ensure public accountability, the Council needs to measure and report on the performance of the health care system, not simply the implementation of the 2003 Health Accord.

To ensure that health care reform is guided by Canadian values and the national standards reflected in the *Canada Health Act*, the Council’s first order of business should be to establish a national process with broad public participation for establishing a health covenant.

The Council needs to be able to provide advice to the provinces on critical health issues, and assess reform options with the aim of promoting a public, not-for-profit system.

2. Independence: the Council should operate at arm’s length from governments and report to Canadians.

3. Public input: the Council should enhance transparency and seek ongoing input and advice from the public.

4. Credible representation: there should be representation from the public; academic, scientific and professional community; individuals with expertise in health system management; and regional representation from across the country.

5. Consolidation of research and assessment: integrate existing health information and assessment agencies into the Council.

The Ecumenical Health Care Network believes a Health Council founded on these principles will foster more effective collaboration between governments in addressing key health challenges, and help to ensure accountability and the sustainability of the health system in Canada.

This Information Fact Sheet is one in a set of information resources produced by the Ecumenical Health Care Network. The Ecumenical Health Care Network is a project of the Commission for Justice and Peace of the Canadian Council of Churches. The Network includes representatives from the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Anglican Church of Canada, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, The Presbyterian Church in Canada, the United Church of Canada, the Catholic Health Association of Canada, and Kairos: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives.

Other Network Fact Sheets and resources can be found on the following website:  
<http://www.ccc-cee.ca/english/jp/index.htm>

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