

# A Health Covenant

## Fact Sheets on Key Health Care Issues

### The “Moral Enterprise” of Health Care Demands a Covenant

The first of 47 recommendations made in the final report of the Commission on the Future of Health Care in Canada (released on November 28, 2002) urged the federal government to “...establish a new Canadian Health Covenant as a tangible statement of Canadians’ values and a guiding force for our publicly funded health care system.” Notably, this was also the major recommendation made by the Ecumenical Health Care Network when they appeared in a public hearing before Mr. Romanow.

Canada’s churches were pleased to have impacted the public policy process in this important manner, but remain convinced that timely government action is now needed to bring a Health Covenant into being.

A Health Covenant could provide a clear statement of the values and objectives of the health care system in Canada, becoming a set of guiding principles for policy makers, health care managers, and health providers. As innovations are encouraged, a Health Covenant could hopefully inspire and guide the exploration of how to improve health care. The nine elements of the churches’ proposed Covenant are



essentially, although not identically, presented in Romanow’s final report, entitled, *Building on Values* (see: [www.healthcarecommission.org](http://www.healthcarecommission.org)).

Canada’s churches are convinced that it is indeed time for Canadians to discuss the future of health care as if their values counted in public policy decisions. In stating boldly that “health care is not like purchasing socks,” the Ecumenical Network held that “the key values of solidarity, community, equity, compassion, and efficiency (which undergird Medicare today) are the values that should take priority over a market-driven approach to health care.”

A major contribution of *Building on Values* is that the not-for-profit versus for-profit debate in Canada is now dead – for any non-ideologically driven observer. However, in the end, politics could overtake moral commitment in reforming health care. A Covenant would provide an important reference point for the choices that will be made. After all, as the churches and Romanow agree, “health care is a moral enterprise.” For those Canadians determined that their health care system should be guided by a Covenant of values under girding a caring and compassionate society, there is no better time to make your voice heard by Mr. Chrétien and your provincial leaders.

The Ecumenical Health Care Network is calling on the new National Health Council to set as its first order of business the development of a participatory process involving Canadians in the creation of a Health Covenant.

**“We recommend... this covenant as the set of principles that set the direction for health care reform in this country.”**

**Ecumenical Health Care Network  
May 2002**

# **A Health Care Covenant proposed by The Ecumenical Health Care Network**

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Ecumenical Health Care Network  
May 2003  
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## **Preamble**

People in Canada understand that how we care for others defines the nature of who we are as a national community. We also know that what we owe each other is essential for who we are as a people. Thus, we have empowered our governments to steward public resources and develop and administer social policy for the common good of all; to ensure that:

Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and his family, including food, clothing, housing, and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

Universal Declaration on Human Rights  
Article 25

As signatory to the World Health Organization Charter, we in Canada have pledged ourselves to a holistic vision of well-being that understands 'health' as [...] a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.

As members of a national community, we in Canada understand that a community actively promotes and nurtures health through compassion, mutuality, care, trust, respect, security and active attention to what justice requires of us.

Thus, in fulfillment of our mutual responsibilities, we and our governments solemnly promise to actively pursue and safeguard a holistic and integrated vision of health care for all people in Canada.

## **A Health Care Covenant for All People in Canada**

Through government, we in Canada pledge to:

## **Universal Access, Comprehensiveness and Portability**

- provide access to comprehensive health care services for individuals, families and communities that places the priority on the worth and dignity of the whole person and their biological, emotional, physical, environmental, social and spiritual needs wherever they may be in Canada;

## **Social Solidarity and Justice**

- uphold a health care system through which all people in Canada share the benefits of health and the burdens of illness with particular compassion for the weak, caring for the vulnerable, solidarity with our neighbours and a commitment to social justice for all;

## **Open to All People in Canada**

- preserve inviolate a health care system that applies to all people in Canada without discrimination toward race, colour, sex, sexual orientation, ability, disability, ethnic origin, language, place of residence, economic status, religion or any other distinction;

## **Social Health and Well-being**

- utilize a systemic approach to creating public policies that, intentionally integrate the social, economic, cultural and environmental determinants of well-being with health;

## **Human Right and Public Good**

- ensure that access to health care is maintained as a human right and a public good, recognizing that health care interactions have meaning to people as a way of caring; health care is not a commodity;

## **Honour the Vocation and Contribution of All Health Care Providers**

- utilize fully the capabilities of all health care professionals, including indigenous practitioners covered under the Canada Health Act, and honour the vocation of all who provide care, whether paid or unpaid;

## **Public Stewardship and Accountability**

- safeguard public administration and limit for-profit delivery of care through mutually enforceable federal and provincial regulations upholding standards of public accountability for a system that addresses the health care needs of individuals, families and communities;

## **Collaboration and Shared Responsibility**

- develop and sustain a health care system founded upon the principles of collaboration and shared responsibility between governments and among providers, not competition or market imperatives; and

## **Participation and Decision-making**

- recognize that health is unique to individuals, families and communities and as such, to honour the right of people to participate in the decisions that affect them and their health.