

Appearance before the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance

Bill C-30: The Budget Implementation Act, 2021

Dr. E. Ann Collins

President of the Canadian Medical Association

May 20, 2021

Check against delivery

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I am Dr. Ann Collins. Over the past three decades, I have taught family medicine, run a full-time family practice, served with the Canadian Armed Forces and worked for 20 years in nursing home care. Today, it is my privilege to speak to you as President of the Canadian Medical Association, representing the sentiments and convictions of our 80,000 physician members.

Since inception in 1867, the Canadian Medical Association has advocated for matters of national health. The pandemic has showcased the enormous strengths and tenacity of the professionals who are at work delivering the nation's health care. It has also shown us how quickly our resources can be overwhelmed.

Our country's recovery hinges on the recuperation of our health networks - because economic security cannot exist without health security. Of the significant investments announced in Budget 2021, we are pleased to see the attention paid to better care for our older adults and communities most impacted. We can create a more dignified provision of care in long term care facilities and support age-in-place strategies. We can address social determinants of health and invest in the battle against climate change. These commitments will fortify the equitable health security of Canadians.

The CMA especially welcomes the federal government's commitment to provide the provinces and territories with \$4 billion through a one-time top up to the Canada Health Transfer. This will support health systems with the capacity to clear the backlog of delayed procedures from the first and second waves.

Bill C-25 is the lifeline to Canadians' immediate health needs. It must pass without delay.

Canada's job now is to address equitable access to primary care teams.

Thirteen percent of the country lacks access to a family doctor or a family care team. That's an astonishing five million Canadians. Primary care is the front door of health care. It is affordable. It fosters equity. And, it will be essential to support Canada through and out of the pandemic. But the door is broken and off its hinges, struggling to remain upright.

The federal government has long expressed commitments to invest in the expansion of primary care. With good reason. Expanding primary care will help ensure every single Canadian has access to a family doctor or primary care provider. Every person in Canada, especially those most impacted by structural inequities, deserves the attention of a primary care team.

At present, much of our care exists in a vacuum. One discipline is completely severed from another. We don't accept divisiveness in any other aspect of life. How can we accept it in our health care system? Primary care is a team-based model that is rooted in the networking of health professionals. They work in concert, just as a healthy body does.

Primary care is the infrastructure with which to deliver mental health services and make virtual and remote care a reality. I think we can all agree that making a distinction between physical health and mental health is antiquated. The time has come to work towards parity in the resources needed to treat Canadians, regardless of their illness.

The future of sustainable health care is housed in the success of primary care. Our younger physicians and physicians-in-training seek to practice under this model. It is the means that will prevent greater illness and further strain on our health care systems. This is the time to support the future of medicine, the future of care, the future of Canadians' health.

The CMA appeals to Parliamentarians to deliver this critical health care resource in Budget 2021. There's still time. An infusion of federal funds in the amount of \$1.2 billion over four years would expand the establishment of primary care teams in each province and territory.

We are equally intent on seeing an increase in federal funding for health care to the provinces and territories in the long term. It is the truest signal of collaboration.

Mr. Chair, let me thank the committee for the invitation. The CMA is grateful for the opportunity.