

For immediate release

Health Care No. 1 Priority for Canadians in Next Week's Budget

Ottawa, March 18, 2011 – Health care should be a top priority in next week's federal budget, according to a new poll conducted for the Canadian Nurses Association (CNA) and the Canadian Medical Association (CMA). The poll comes as the organizations representing Canada's nurses and physicians are holding national consultations with Canadians on the future of the country's ailing health care system.

“The government is telling Canadians that its top priority is the economy, while Canadians are saying their number one concern is health care,” said Judith Shamian, president of CNA. “The expectations of Canadians are clear and decision-makers would be unwise to ignore them.”

The Nanos Research poll indicated that 45 per cent of Canadians think the federal government should make health care a priority in the budget, compared to 35 per cent who chose the economy and 15 per cent who ranked the environment first. In addition, a strong majority of Canadians would support the introduction of a wide range of budget measures to improve the health care system.

“Over the course of our national dialogue on health care, we've heard repeatedly from Canadians how concerned they are about the current state of medicare,” said Dr. Jeff Turnbull, president of the CMA. “The fact is, you can't have a healthy economy without healthy Canadians and a robust health care system to treat them when they are ill. The polling results show that Canadians understand this.”

Respondents also strongly favoured a range of possible budget initiatives related to health care. Canadians thought it was important to have programs that promote good health and wellness (86 per cent); home care allowing patients to go back to their homes with the assistance of their families and friends, and with appropriate support from a health care professional (86 per cent); a comprehensive national strategy to help Canadians age as healthfully as possible (84 per cent); a program to ensure access to prescription drugs based on need and not ability to pay (86 per cent); and long-term care in a specialized setting for patients who need assistance and health care support outside of hospital (86 per cent).

Other possible measures supported by respondents to improve health or the health care system included: investment in a clean environment (88 per cent); addressing challenges such as wait times for care or finding a primary care provider (85 per cent); investments in health research (83 per cent); and investments in technology such as an electronic health record for every Canadian (77 per cent). This support cut across regions and demographic groups.

The Nanos national telephone survey was carried out March 12 to 15 and is considered accurate within 2.8 percentage points, plus or minus, 19 times out of 20.

CNA is the national professional voice of registered nurses in Canada. A federation of 11 provincial and territorial nursing associations and colleges representing 143,843 registered nurses, CNA advances the practice and profession of nursing to improve health outcomes and strengthen Canada's publicly funded, not-for-profit health system.

The Canadian Medical Association (CMA) is the national voice of Canadian physicians. Founded in 1867, CMA's mission is to serve and unite the physicians of Canada and be the national advocate, in partnership with the people of Canada, for the highest standards of health and health care. The CMA is a voluntary professional organization representing over 74,000 of Canada's physicians and comprising 12 provincial and territorial medical associations and 51 national medical organizations.

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For more information:

Jean Riverin
External Communications Coordinator
jriverin@cna-aiic.ca

Tel: 800-361-8404 ext. 553

Cell: 613-697-7507

Lucie Boileau
Manager, Media Relations
lucie.boileau@cma.ca

Tel: 800-663-7336 / 613-731-8610, ext. 1266

Cell: 613 447-0866