

An Investment in Public Health: An Investment in Canada's Future Prosperity

Budget 2010: CPHA Response

The 2010 Budget contains several proposed policy and programmatic levers that should have, if instituted on a timely basis and with full federal commitment, a positive impact on the health of many Canadians. The Canadian Public Health Association (CPHA) appreciates the proposed measures designed to increase access to healthy foods for people living in the north, to promote physical activity, to improve income security and tax relief for low-income and single-parent families, continued investment in social housing, and continued infrastructure development on Aboriginal reserves. CPHA is also pleased to see continued and new investments in support to people living with spinal cord injuries, diversifying and strengthening the capacity of Canada's supply of medical isotopes, and the renewal of several Aboriginal health programs. Our Association also welcomes the increased investment in support of health research, albeit a very modest increase.

That being said, the budget lacks any fundamental shift in the way things are done. Most of the announcements relate to sector-specific initiatives that tackle symptoms, rather than addressing the factors that cause health-related issues in the first place. "We have to be realistic; these measures are not going to address the underlying issues that affect health", stated Dr. Cordell Neudorf, the Association's Chair. "Individual life-style changes, while important, are not the panacea. It is the "big-ticket" items, such as income, food and housing security, a safe and healthy environment, that have the greatest impact on health. Although the federal government's proposed measures will have an impact on health for some people, it lacks a sustained response for those most vulnerable. Strategic investments in core social programs are required in times of economic downturn and recovery not scaling back or maintaining the status quo when more people need them most".

CPHA is concerned about the potential impact on public health services should the government institute cuts in operational and programmatic budgets at Health Canada, the Public Health Agency of Canada, and other health-related bodies, including the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. "CPHA has called consistently upon the federal government to increase its support for our country's public health infrastructure and leadership. This includes funding support for public health services and programs at the local and federal levels. Full funding of the Public Health Agency of Canada, our country's equivalent of the US Centers for Disease Control and Protection, is essential," said Dr. Neudorf. "The past year's H1N1 response demonstrated that our national public health system works effectively," he continued. "But it also demonstrated that it was stretched to the limit. We cannot afford to let down our guard now. This is the time to invest in strengthening and expanding public health capacity in Canada."

Although not mentioned in the budget speech, CPHA welcomes the announcement in the Speech from the Throne to establish a new national strategy on childhood injury prevention. As Debra Lynkowski, CPHA's CEO, highlighted, "Unintentional injuries – due to motor vehicle crashes, fires, burns, falls, drowning and poisoning – are the leading cause of death of children aged 1 to 11 years in Canada. Action needs to be taken to address this situation. CPHA urged the federal government to adopt a national injury prevention strategy in 2003 – we are pleased to see that this will finally become a reality." However, CPHA is concerned about the lack of mention in the budget for renewed funding for very important national health programs, such as the National Immunization Strategy, which are reaching the end of their funding cycle. "To not continue funding one of the most essential public health services this country has to offer will have a very profound impact on the health of our country's children, young people and seniors", she pointed out.

While CPHA welcomes the government's desire for a greener, more environmentally responsible Canada, it is very concerned about what it sees as a movement towards promotion of energy generation technologies at the possible expense of the public's health. Although Canada has launched a nuclear waste management strategy, the country is far from resolving the safe, long-

term storage of waste generated through existing nuclear power stations; and, here the government is calling for increased uranium mining and reliance on nuclear energy. CPHA's concern extends as well to the government's intention to transfer responsibility for conducting environmental assessment from the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency to the National Energy Board and the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission for projects that fall under their respective areas of expertise. Full consideration must be given to the public health and environmental health aspects of all energy generation technologies and resources.

CPHA welcomes the government's announcement about its new focus on maternal, newborn and child health, but adds a cautionary note. "It is laudable that Canada will use the opportunity of our presidency of the G8 to advocate for maternal and child health, but we will be far more persuasive if we back our words with tangible investments in the form of program and policy improvements here at home and matched with an emphasis in these areas with our international aid investments," Neudorf commented. At the same time, CPHA noted with dismay the announcement in the budget about the \$4.4 billion decrease in future allocations to Canada's international assistance envelope. "If we are going to be taken seriously by people around the world, and if we want to protect the health of people in Canada, we need to ensure that Canada invests, and invests significantly, in improving the health of people around the world," stated Lynkowski. "We don't live on an island – whether it's H1N1, an earthquake in Haiti, or access for young women to good quality and accessible reproductive health and pre-natal and post-partum health services, our health and well-being is affected by events in other countries. Their well-being is our well-being."