

# Statement by Roy Romanow

*regarding the*

## **2003 First Ministers' Accord on Health Care Renewal**

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Yesterday's First Ministers' Accord represents progress towards reform of Canada's health care system. Canadians should be encouraged by the flexibility demonstrated by all parties to achieve consensus and by the civility that characterized these discussions. Having been present at many of these meetings, I want to pay tribute to the Prime Minister and First Ministers in achieving their Accord.

The Agreement puts Canadians firmly on the road toward progressive reform on a number of key areas identified in my Commission's final report. Positive measures include:

- Earmarking resources for priority areas of reform, including primary care (with defined targets), homecare (including first dollar coverage for defined care), catastrophic drug coverage, medical equipment (including training) and electronic patient records, among others;
- Reaffirming the principles of the Canada Health Act;
- Replacing the Canada Health and Social Transfer with a dedicated Canada Health Transfer to make the system more transparent;
- Implementing a Health Council that provides an oversight role for providers and patients to make the system more accountable and relevant; and
- Additional funding to stabilize the system in the short-term and facilitate transformation over the long-term.

The agreement to establish common indicators and benchmarks to measure overall progress is also a welcome development and represents significant progress over the September 2000 Accord which simply established priorities. All of these measures are an important step forward and deserve the support of Canadians.

However, some aspects of the Accord require greater clarity and precision and above all, continued vigilance by concerned Canadians will be needed to ensure positive momentum is sustained. In particular, Canadians will need to carefully monitor:

- Progress toward setting and achieving performance targets, as well as more general objectives, in areas like primary care, home care and catastrophic drug coverage;
- The eventual structure and mandate of the Health Council, to ensure it provides for meaningful and effective public and provider oversight; and
- That funds allocated to improve timely access to advanced diagnostic equipment, including MRIs, are effectively leveraged by including them within the public system.

I believe concerted efforts must be made to improve the governance and delivery of health and social services to aboriginal peoples in Canada. The health situation of our aboriginal peoples is intolerable and unacceptable in a society as rich as ours. In addition, First Ministers must work hard to understand and resolve the legitimate issues that have been expressed by the Territorial governments.

While the benefits of this Accord will only begin to be felt by Canadians in the mid to long-term, I am satisfied that we have embarked on the road toward much needed reform.

I will continue to analyze the Accord and will be making a more substantive comment on it on February 13, 2003, in a public address at the University of Regina.

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