



ASSOCIATION CATHOLIQUE
CANADIENNE DE LA SANTÉ
CATHOLIC HEALTH
ASSOCIATION OF CANADA

COMMUNIQUE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

SOCIAL JUSTICE: A "YES" TO THE WORLD

Ottawa — What does a commitment to social justice mean for health care providers and administrators? Where can they find the strength and inspiration to work toward social justice in their day-to-day lives? These are some of the questions members and stakeholders of the Catholic Health Association of Canada (CHAC) will explore during the Association's annual convention in Saint John, NB, May 3-5. More than 300 people will gather to hear prominent speakers and to discuss action they can take for the building of a truly healthy and just society.

During its annual convention, CHAC will also launch its position paper on the future of the Canadian health care system. In *Prescription for a Healthier Canada*, the Association argues that the fundamental social values on which the current health system is based must be reaffirmed.

In addition, the Association will unveil the name of the 1997 recipient of the *Performance Citation Award*, Canada's highest distinction in Catholic health care. The Award is given each year to a person or a group who exemplify leadership in an activity, program or project worthy of national recognition for its building up of the Christian community in an extraordinary way.

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Note: Copies of the convention program are available upon request. You will find attached a feature article about the connection between health and social justice for reproduction as you see fit.

The Catholic Health Association of Canada (CHAC) is a national Christian association supportive of health care in the tradition of the Roman Catholic church. Its members include eight provincial/regional associations; 127 hospitals and homes; 106 associates comprised of religious orders, dioceses, physicians, etc.; 34 owner members of health care institutions; eight corporate members; and 276 individual members. The CHAC, the national voice for Catholic health care, strives to have a concern for health in all its aspects: physical, emotional, spiritual and social.

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(Note to Editors: The following article can be reproduced as you see fit.)

ACHIEVING HEALTH THROUGH SOCIAL JUSTICE

One of the defining features of the last decades of the 20th century is a deepening awareness of, and concern for, health and well-being. That concern is evident in a variety of forms. It is witnessed in the interest people have today in self-help groups and alternative healing practices, and in their efforts to become informed and to make changes in their lifestyles as regards diet, exercise and leisure activity. It is also evident in the growing interest in establishing healthy communities and sustainable cities, and in ecology and the health of the planet. These changes may be indicative of a wider desire on the part of people to take responsibility not only in their individual lives but in society at large.

With this deepening awareness of health comes a gradual understanding that a strong connection links our health to the social and economic environment we live in. Economic and work conditions, as well as social attitudes and structures can facilitate, or be obstacles to, the cultivation of healthy attitudes. Consider this¹:

In Canada, men in the upper income group live six years longer than men with a low income.

Infant mortality in the lowest income group is double that of the highest.

- Studies found that men and women who rate their jobs as low for control, variety, skill use, support at work, and job satisfaction have higher rates of sickness absence. A lack of support from friends or relatives and financial difficulties also contribute to higher rates.

Researchers are discovering a vital connection between support, reassurance and effective medical care: 90 per cent of patients who reach out for medical help suffer from self-limiting disorders well within the range of the body's own healing powers, challenging caregivers to find ways to encourage patients' will to live and mobilize the body's natural resources to combat disease.

Enhanced health status and overall well-being will be obtained, therefore, not only through improvements in the health care system, but also through increased attention to the economic, social and physical factors which influence health, employment, education, housing, social support and workplace conditions.

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The following elements are excerpts from the Catholic Health Association of Canada's publication *Integrating Health and Values Toward a Shared Vision*.

As a community of people who have a mission to transform the world on behalf of justice and human dignity, Christians can play an important role in ensuring that social structures and institutions are just and support health. The Christian faith is a social faith. The values underlying the church's social teaching are:

Human dignity — The test of every institution or policy is whether it enhances or threatens human life and dignity.

The call to community and the common good — Human life is life in community. The dignity of the individual is therefore inherently connected to the good of society. Everyone has an obligation to contribute to the common good.

Rights and responsibilities of the person — Everyone has a fundamental right to life and to those things which make life truly human: food, clothing, housing, health care, education and employment. People also have complementary responsibilities to one another.

Option for the poor and vulnerable — Catholic social teaching suggests that a basic moral test of any society is how the weak are treated.

Solidarity — We are one human family, whatever our national, racial, ethnic, and ideological differences. Solidarity calls us to see the poor and the powerless as our own brothers and sisters. Solidarity insists that employers and employees see one another in complementary roles, working to achieve commonly agreed upon objectives.

The Christian life calls for active involvement in the world and for action that witnesses to God's love for the poor and the vulnerable. Accordingly, the principles of social justice must be applied at every level of the current restructuring of the health care system. Representatives of Christian health care have a unique opportunity to bring this social justice perspective to the reform agenda.

"As directors and members of the Catholic Health Association of Canada (CHAC), we believe that the major economic and social reforms taking place in Canada today are having a critical impact on the lives of many Canadians. Through our daily work in the health care field, we witness the human suffering and erosion of social support taking place in communities across the country," said Raymond Lafond, CHAC Chairperson.

“We are faced with the challenges that all Canadians share in searching for just solutions to Canada’s economic and social problems. In our view, what is urgently needed is public discussion about these reforms from a social justice perspective, and consideration of alternative solutions.”

The CHAC’s annual convention on social justice, May 3 to 5, 1997, in Saint John NB, is one way for the Association to foster such a discussion. The Association also urges its members to become involved during the upcoming federal election campaign. It is preparing an election package highlighting key health and social issues which CHAC members can raise with their local candidates. “The upcoming federal election campaign provides an opportunity for all candidates to demonstrate their support for Canada’s publicly funded health care system,” said Mr. Lafond.

The CHAC will also launch, as part of the convention, its position paper on the future of the health care system. Entitled *Prescription for a Healthier Canada*, the paper argues that the fundamental social values on which the current health system is based must be reaffirmed. It outlines values and principles, as well as strategic directions which the Association believes are necessary if Canadians are to build upon and improve the framework which has contributed to the establishment of one of the most successful universal health care systems in the world.