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CHAC Highlights Need for Strong Values Base in new Reproductive and Genetic Technologies Legislation

Ottawa - The Catholic Health Association of Canada (CHAC) has submitted a brief to Health Canada in response to the Department's consultation concerning its *Workbook on Reproductive and Genetic Technologies*. In its brief the CHAC expressed concern that the *Workbook's* presentation of values and guiding principles does not give sufficient precedence to "human dignity and rights." Instead, the document emphasizes safeguarding the "benefits to individuals and society of reproductive technologies" and "protecting and promoting human health and safety."

In 1993 the Royal Commission on New Reproductive Technologies called on the federal government to act promptly in introducing legislation that would prohibit certain reproductive and genetic technologies (RGTs), and establish a regulatory body to manage the use of these technologies. The CHAC has written to the Minister of Health on numerous occasions since that time urging that legislation be introduced. Bill C-47, which was introduced in 1996, would have banned 13 problematic procedures. The bill died on the Order Paper in 1997 with the call of a federal election. The Liberal government chose not to reintroduce the bill after its re-election.

With the release of its *Workbook* in February 2000, Health Canada announced it is now ready to go forth with legislation that will prohibit unacceptable RGTs, and regulate others. The consultation document lists the practices that could be prohibited under legislation, and highlights proposed areas for regulatory development.

"Given the centrality which human dignity and rights occupy within the Canadian Constitution and within our political and cultural consensus, the issue of values within the *Workbook* is of particular concern," said Mrs. Mary Pat Skene, CHAC chairperson. In its brief the CHAC proposes a series of foundational ethical values and principles to shape the dialogue.

Values:

1. Respect for the human person, including the dignity, rights and social interconnectedness intrinsic to the person.
2. Respect for human life from conception.

3. Promotion of human health and safety.
4. Protecting the interests and well-being of children.
5. Particular concern for the burdens borne by women in the area of human reproduction.
6. The non-commercialization of the human being and of all dimensions of human reproduction, including human gametes and genes.
7. Free and informed consent as a foundational condition for the use of any technology or therapy.
8. Acceptance of human and material limits, and the need to balance access to services with responsible stewardship of goods and services.

Principles:

1. Medicine must be evidence-based.
2. All research and therapy, as well as any regulatory body, must be accountable to the public.
3. The freedom of conscience of providers and institutions in accordance with their vision of the “good life” must be respected.

“The prohibitions outlined in the Workbook and the establishment of a regulatory body to oversee reproductive and genetic technologies are extremely vital issues. It is imperative that government act now in exercising leadership in this area,” said Richard Haughian, CHAC president.

Health Canada says it is committed to discussions with provincial and territorial governments as well as with a group of stakeholders prior to introducing the bill.