



ASSOCIATION CATHOLIQUES
CANADIENNE DE LA SANTÉ

CATHOLIC HEALTH
ASSOCIATION OF CANADA

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CHAC Concerned Senate Committee Recommendations Would Lead to the Commercialization of Health Care

Ottawa - The final report of the Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology that was released today suggests that fostering competition between hospitals for the provision of medical services, and creating internal markets within the health care system, are necessary to ensure cost-effectiveness, efficiency, and the long-term sustainability of Canada's health care system. "The CHAC is concerned that the overall thrust of the Senate Committee's recommendations would lead to the further commercialization of health care and the loss of the caring dimension that is central to compassionate and quality health care," said Janet Brown, Chairperson of the Catholic Health Association of Canada (CHAC).

There are elements of the Senate report that the CHAC supports: the affirmation of the federal government's role in health care and the need for increased federal funding; the call for greater accountability for health care spending; recognition of the importance of palliative care; the outline of the steps required for primary health care reform; and acknowledgement of the need to expand the range of services covered by medicare.

However, while the Senate Committee says it is supportive of the principles of the *Canada Health Act* and of the publicly funded health care system, the thrust of many of its recommendations would fundamentally change the nature of health care delivery in Canada. "The Committee's defense of medicare becomes ambiguous when it says that the creation of private, for-profit facilities should not be prohibited, and when it calls for the introduction of competition and other market mechanisms to the health care system," said Mrs. Brown.

The expansion of private, for-profit health care delivery has become a key issue in the current debate about health care reform. Both Alberta and Ontario have recently made decisions to enlarge the role of for-profit providers in the provision of publicly funded services. Earlier this week, in a speech in St. John's, Roy Romanow, head of the Royal Commission studying Canada's health care system, commented on such expansion saying: "Left unchecked, this situation will eventually mean medicare's demise."

The Senate Committee's openness to for-profit health care ignores the overwhelming evidence which shows that hopes for increased efficiency through increased for-profit provision of health care have no empirical support and face extensive counter-evidence. This point has been made by federal Health Minister Anne McLellan who said, "I think it's becoming clearer and clearer, based on the evidence, there are no cost savings, increased efficiency or

increased quality of health care by delivery through for-profit institutions of whatever kind.”
(*Toronto Star*, June 25, 2002)

In its submission to the Senate Committee, the CHAC emphasized the need to change the focus of health care reform from the marketplace toward a discussion of the core values that underpin the health care system. The CHAC believes that for the majority of Canadians those values are equality (or fairness), compassion, dignity and respect, efficiency, and a sense of communal or collective responsibility. “We are concerned that the Senate’s report presents health care as a commodity to which market values and principles can be easily applied. This is not the case. The availability of good health care is vital to the character of community life. It involves care for people when they are their most vulnerable. As such, health care cannot be reduced to a mere commodity,” said Mrs. Brown.

The choices that will be made by the federal government in the coming months regarding the goals of our health care system will have important consequences for all Canadians. The CHAC urges governments not to look to market principles as the source of all solutions. As Dr. Nuala Kenny said in her testimony before the Senate Committee, “The biggest losers in increasing the role of the market [in Canada’s health care system] will include women and children, and especially those living in poverty, the chronically ill, the elderly and the dying.”