

Calgary... June 30, 2004

***Challenging Health System Sustainability: Understanding Health System Performance of Leading Countries* — Conference Board Of Canada June 2004**

Scope of Study

The study looked at six OECD countries: Switzerland, Sweden, Spain, Australia, New Zealand and France. All outperformed Canada in some areas; five had higher overall health care performance.

Highlights of Findings

- No one system provides the optimal balance between low cost and high quality. Of the six:
 - Switzerland has the best health care record. Its system is the most expensive, and 43 per cent of funding is from private sources.
 - Sweden is ranked the second best performer. It is one of the lowest spenders and is largely publicly funded; 15 per cent of health funding is from private sources.
 - Canada is closer to the Swiss model, with 30 per cent of health funding from private sources.
- New Zealand has kept pharmaceutical cost to 3 per cent growth; Canada is 9.3 per cent.
- Workers in Sweden are more satisfied despite earning significantly less than workers in Canada.
- Most top-performing countries have better actions on the broader determinants of health: environmental stewardship, health promotion, tobacco consumption and traffic collisions.
- Integrated elder care that provides more support services may keep costs under control.
- Electronic health records and continuing education support better patient care.
- Every country has user fees or co-payments, but apply them differently, with different outcomes.
- Wait times are a challenge for all countries except France and Switzerland. Avoiding long wait times is expensive and complex.

Eight Conclusions

- Money alone is not the answer.
- Canada must do more to control escalating pharmaceutical costs.
- Creating and maintaining a satisfied and productive workforce is vital.
- Canada needs to focus more on health promotion, prevention and determinants of health.
- An aging population does not have to result in a more expensive health system.
- Investing in information technologies and training creates a more productive workforce.
- User fees/cost-sharing control costs under certain circumstances, but have consequences.
- A public system with no or low user fees needs adequate surgical capacity to avoid long wait times.

Characteristics of Top-Performing Countries

- Leaders willing to make tough decisions to continually improve the health care system; a public that understands what the system can provide and is engaged in improving personal health.
- Workers willing to accept decisions that balance their interests with public interest.

For further information, contact:

Howard May
Communications,
Alberta Health and Wellness
(403) 297-8268