Canadian Health Coalition

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January 21, 1981

Senator Harry Hays,
Serge Joyal, M.P.,
Co-Chairmen,
Special Joint Committee
on the Constitution,
c/o Mr. Richard Pregent,
Clerk of the Committee,
Room 512, Metropolitan Building,
180 Wellington Street,
Ottawa, Ontario

Gentlemen:

The Canadian Health Coalition is a diverse and broadly based
group of organizations which have banded together to demonstrate their concern
about Canada's health care system. At present, the Coalition consists of more
than 8 provincial coalitions and more than 30 national organizations and
represents the interests of the consumers of health services across the country.
The Coalition is primarily interested in preventing a further erosion in
medicare, encouraging substantial changes and improvements in the existing
health care system and increasing the involvement of consumers in the develop­
ment and planning of health services.

Representatives of the Health Coalition have reviewed the
Proposed Resolution for a Joint Address to Her Majesty the Queen respecting
the Constitution of Canada and, in particular, Part I, the Canadian Charter of
Rights and Freedoms. We were disappointed to note the lack of any reference
to the right to a high standard of health and the right to adequate and
appropriate health care.

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Dedicated to saving medicare and to improving the health care system
Objectifs: sauver l'assurance santé et améliorer le régime de soins de santé
Although improvements are needed, the Canadian Health Coalition believes that Canada has one of the best health care systems in the world. This has largely been the result of an evolution in our thinking from a point where health care was considered a privilege to our present notion of health care as a right. We believe that the vast majority of Canadians would accept without reservation the premise that access to health care is a right of all citizens which should not be affected by socio-economic status, residency or other such factors. The failure to include the right to health and health care appears to ignore this fundamental change in the thinking of Canadians.

It should also be pointed out that Canada is a party to the International Covenant on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights. Article 12 of the Covenant is of particular relevance. It affirms that:

1. The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.

2. The steps to be taken by the States Parties to the present Covenant to achieve the full realization of this right shall include those necessary for:

   (a) The provision for the reduction of the stillbirth-rate and of infant mortality and for the healthy development of the child;

   (b) The improvement of all aspects of environmental and industrial hygiene;

   (c) The prevention, treatment and control of epidemic, endemic, occupational and other diseases;

   (d) The creations of conditions which would assure to all medical service and medical attention in the event of sickness.

The Canadian Health Coalition believes that, as a signatory to the above Covenant, Canada has implicitly endorsed the concept of health and health care as a right. The time is ripe to make such a declaration more explicit and meaningful.
best be done by incorporating the right to health and health care in the proposed charter of rights and freedoms. We urge members of the committee to give serious consideration to our request.

Yours sincerely,

Jim MacDonald,
Chairman