



Canada's physicians have always strongly believed that no Canadian should be denied the medical care he or she needs because of an inability to pay. Canada's physicians also believe that all Canadians must have appropriate and timely access to the care they need. Yet, all too often, the commitment of physicians and other health-care professionals to our patients is undermined by the failings of the system itself. This is unacceptable.

It is unacceptable that upwards of five million Canadians still do not have access to a family physician.

It is unacceptable that it is "normal" procedure for hospitals to let patients languish in hallways because no beds can be found for them.

It is unacceptable that patients stay for weeks and months in acute-care hospital beds because of a lack of appropriate long-term care in their communities.

It is unacceptable that patients are discharged from the hospital without having a doctor in the community to monitor their care and without having arrangements in place for the community support and services they need.

Building a better health-care system for Canada means, first and foremost, ensuring that the system is meeting the needs of patients. That is the foundation of high-quality, effective medical care. The Canadian Medical Association (CMA) supports the establishment of national standards that will help to ensure the best patient care and outcomes. At the same time, health spending in Canada has increased to such an extent that too often it is funding — or, more accurately, the lack of it — that dictates what care gets delivered to patients.

Health care now eats up almost half of provincial/territorial program spending. That is both unacceptable and unsustainable. That is why the doctor of Canada believe that the issue is not how to do more with less.



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The issue is how to do better.

To this end, Canada Health Infoway — the organization formed by the federal government to implement its e-health agenda — has set 2016 as the goal for every Canadian to have an electronic health record (EHR). The EHR will help patients by making it easier for crucial medical information to flow from point to point in the health-care system. This will improve care by reducing duplication of services and ensuring more timely access to needed information.

However, the first step to a national EHR begins right where you are now, in your doctor's office. That is why the CMA has set its sights on having electronic medical records in every physician's office — not in seven years, not in five years, but by the end of 2011.

The CMA believes that the time to act is now. We are engaging patients, the general public and policy-makers in creating a new blueprint to transform our health-care system so that it puts patients first. This effort will mean building on the original principles of medicare to transform the system to meet modern-day needs. What it will not mean, however, is a top-down approach that ignores the wishes and desires of Canadians. Just the opposite.

Physicians have always embraced and, indeed, led the call for change that would benefit their patients. And we will continue to do so. As we work to improve our health-care system, we need to hear from you. I encourage you to go to [www.cma.ca](http://www.cma.ca) to learn more about the CMA's Health Care Transformation project. I also encourage you to weigh in with your thoughts on how we can make this plan it better.

It's our health-care system. Let's work on making it better together.

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