

HOT ON THE Hill

Winter 2015



**Canada's
Nurses**
STANDING UP
FOR HEALTHCARE

There's a New PM in the House

On October 19, 2015, over 17 million Canadians cast their ballots in the country's 42nd federal election, making for the highest voter turnout since 1993. Canadians overwhelmingly elected Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and the Liberal Party of Canada on a platform of change, with nearly 40 per cent of the popular vote.

During the election campaign, the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions (CFNU) highlighted four key areas that needed to be addressed: a safe seniors' strategy, a national prescription drug program, developing a health human resources plan, and committing to a strong publicly-funded health care system.

The CFNU compiled the Liberal's health platform on the four issues that we highlighted during the election, and we will be monitoring their progress on these issues over the coming months:

1. National Prescription Drug Program

The Liberal Party promised to return to the table with the provinces to negotiate a new Health Accord. Their priorities for a new Health Accord include improving access and reducing costs to prescription drugs.

2. Safe Seniors' Strategy

The Liberals put much of their focus on seniors, committing to \$3 billion in funding for home care over the next four years. Further, they committed to \$20 billion in social infrastructure with a priority on investing in seniors facilities, including long-term care.

3. Defending Public Funding and Delivery of Health Care

The Liberals promised to return to the table with the provinces and develop a new Health Accord. They also expressed their belief that every Canadian deserves access to timely publicly-funded health care.

4. National Health Human Resources Plan

The Liberal plan did not release details of an HHR strategy.



Read the whole story at voteforcare.ca.

AUTHORIZED BY THE CANADIAN FEDERATION OF NURSES UNIONS.



What's Next?

The CFNU welcomes the Liberal commitment to convening a First Ministers' Meeting on forging a new Health Accord with provinces and territories, including a new long-term agreement on funding.

"On behalf of the nearly 200,000 nurses the CFNU represents across Canada, I welcome the Liberal government's commitment to forging a new Health Accord with the provinces and territories," said Linda Silas, CFNU President. "While the Harper government is now history, the Conservative legacy of neglect towards our health care system remains, and Canadians expect federal and provincial governments to work together on these critical issue."

The CFNU has called a meeting of health care stakeholders later this month to be ready and united in advance of the First Ministers' Meeting on a new Health Accord.

"A new Health Accord will help establish the parameters of an evolving health system, and the renewal of our public health care system is something that frontline nurses want to see come out of the negotiations," said Silas.

The CFNU will attend a national Health Ministers Meeting with the provinces scheduled in the New Year, and Canada's Nurses will continue to work with elected representatives at all levels of government to ensure that we are able to provide quality, safe patient care to all Canadians.

Also this month, CFNU president Linda Silas will join the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) for a meeting with new Minister of International Trade, Chrystia Freeland, to discuss concerns with the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP).



After nearly a decade of federal neglect, we look forward to a positive working relationship with the federal government on a number of key issues that are critical to enhancing and protecting our universal public health care system.



Trudeau Addresses Canada's Labour Leaders

On November 10, 2015, Prime Minister Trudeau addressed a national meeting of Canadian Council labour leaders from across the country, including CFNU President Linda Silas and Secretary Treasurer Pauline Worsfold. Trudeau is the first sitting Prime Minister in 50 years to address the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC), signaling the onset of a new era in relations between the labour movement and the federal government.

"Canada's Nurses are very pleased to hear a strong message of collaboration for the betterment of all Canadians from this government," said CFNU President Linda Silas. "After nearly a decade of federal neglect, we look forward to a positive working relationship with the federal government on a number of key issues that are critical to enhancing and protecting our universal, public health care system."

In his address to labour leaders, Trudeau spoke about the middle class, gender equality, and received a standing ovation for recommitting to repeal anti-union Bills C-377 and C-525.

Bills C-377 and C-525 Update

Revoking Unconstitutional Legislation

Under almost ten years of rule by the Harper Conservatives, hard-won workers' rights have been under consistent attack. Since the 2011 election we have had conservative majorities in both the House of Commons and the Senate. This has allowed for an increased level of attacks on organized labour in Canada.

Most of the struggle has focused on two pieces of legislation which were pushed through during the last parliament. Bill C-377 and Bill C-525 are controversial acts which each undercut fundamental rights in both the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and the *Constitution of Canada*, not to mention violating many international covenants on workers' rights. By undermining the right to refuse dangerous work, privacy laws, provincial constitutional rights, freedom of association and more, the past federal government had set-up in motion a protracted period of constitutional and charter challenges, which would have stretched for years in expensive legal wrangling.

Fortunately, on October 19, 2015, Canadians voted for a new federal government, one that had explicitly promised to overturn these ill-advised federal bills. Toward fulfilling this promise, on November 13, 2015, Prime Minister Trudeau published thirty **ministerial mandate letters** which outline the key commitments of the government and direction for each department and minister. In the mandate given to the new Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, MaryAnne Mihychuk, both of these acts were slated to be revoked. Specifically, the minister was directed to "restore a fair and balanced approach to organized labour by repealing Bills C-377 and C-525 and implementing a modern Fair Wages Policy."

The CFNU and other unions are very encouraged by these assertions and will be following up with the minister and the new federal government to ensure that these commitments are kept. Beyond signaling this new approach with labour, it will be important to have legislation and programs that substantively improve the lives of working people in Canada, with big improvements possible in areas related to public health care.

42nd Speech from the Throne

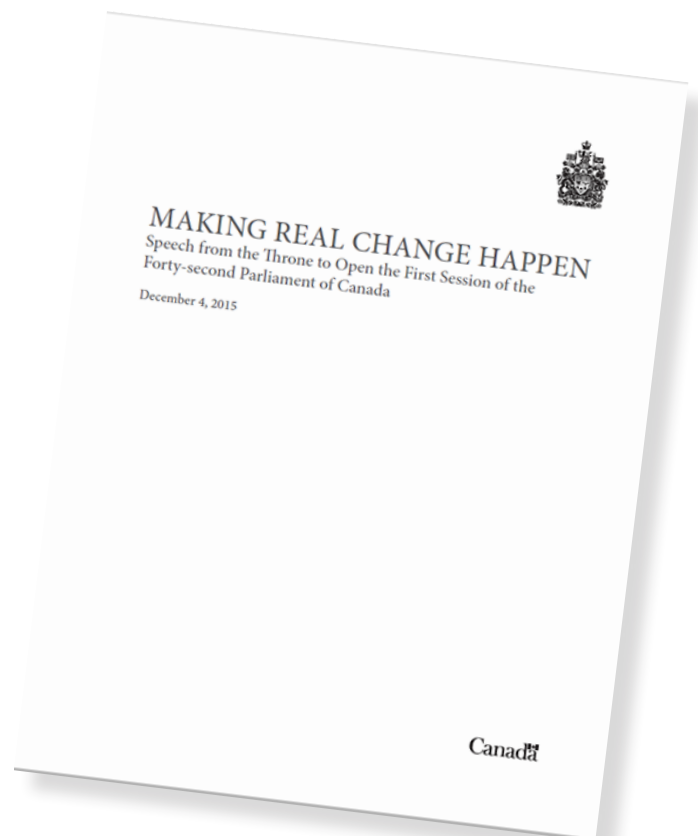
Making Real Change Happen

On December 4, 2015, Governor General David Johnston delivered the Speech from the Throne to open the first session of the 42nd Parliament of Canada. Keeping things brief – the Throne Speech outlines the new government's plans for 'Making Real Change Happen.'

There were five key themes shared with Parliament:

1. **Growth for the Middle Class;**
2. **Open and Transparent Government;**
3. **A Clean Environment and a Strong Economy;**
4. **Diversity is Canada's Strength; and**
5. **Security and Opportunity.**

The government shared their belief that all Canadians should have a real and fair chance to succeed, and central to that success is a strong and growing middle class. The government reiterated campaign commitments such as the new Canada Child Benefit, Canada Pension Plan, investments in public transit, green infrastructure and social infrastructure, and making post-secondary education more affordable. They also outlined working with the provinces and territories to support the health and well-being of all Canadians by working together on a new Health Accord.



Trade Deals Have Major Negative Impact on Health Care

The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) is a trade agreement negotiated on October 5, 2015, in the midst of the last federal election. It comes on the heels of another massive trade agreement signed by the Harper government, the Canada-European Union Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA).

Since the TPP was announced during the election, it has become a very contentious issue, and it is unclear how the new government is going to handle a deal negotiated and signed by the Harper Conservatives. Both the TPP and CETA need to be ratified by all signatory governments before they come into effect, so it still may well occur that both deals unravel.

Already there are serious concerns being raised in the various TPP countries and by respected groups like Médecins Sans Frontières/Doctors Without Borders (MSF). For the CFNU, a key reason to be very concerned about this trade deal is that governments already admit it will greatly increase the cost of prescription drugs in Canada. These added costs will greatly impact access to medicines and overall health care costs, both of which will have adverse outcomes for patients.

Looking at the CETA details which have been public longer, researchers have been able to estimate that the increased drug costs to Canadians are between \$850 million and \$1.645 billion annually. The TPP is not as far-reaching but unpublished estimates are that the TPP would add more than \$600 million to annual prescription drug costs. If these deals come into effect,

this is money that will be lost every year, with no added benefit to patients. The only beneficiary are the large drug companies which already are the most profitable corporations on the planet.

Canadians already pay the second highest drug costs in the world, and the provisions in these trade deals that will keep cheaper generic drugs off the market longer mean Canadians will pay even more. On every level this makes no sense and is unconscionable, especially when you consider that over half the TPP countries are less-developed, and higher drug costs will leave even more patients suffering and dying without access to essential medicines. This is the reason MSF launched a [campaign against the TPP](#), and the CFNU shares these concerns.

During the election, the Liberal government promised 'a full and open public debate in Parliament to ensure Canadians are consulted on this historic trade agreement.' There is still hope that these trade agreements do not come into force. The Europeans have grave concerns about the rights in CETA that allow foreign corporations to sue governments directly, these are shared by many groups around the globe. As the debate on these trade agreements continues, the CFNU will be voicing our concerns about the negative impacts to our universal, public health care system.

While the federal government has promised to compensate the provinces for added drug costs, we think this money is better spent directly on health care. Any compensation also will not address out-of-pocket increases for individuals or raised costs for private insurance plans.

The CFNU is working with the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives to also look at how the TPP impacts other aspects of health care in Canada. Will it harm our ability to regulate or expand public health care in Canada? Does it block expansion of our health care system to include pharmacare, long-term care, etc.? There are many questions that remain regarding the impact of these trade deals. As our government looks at whether to sign this agreement, we will be bringing forward our concerns, both for patients here in Canada, and for the millions more that will be impacted in poorer countries.

On December 9, 2015, CFNU president Linda Silas will join the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) for a meeting with new Minister of International Trade, Chrystia Freeland, to discuss concerns with the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP) and what it will mean for our health care system.



Meet the New Health Minister

Philpott Handed Health Portfolio

On November 4, 2015, Prime Minister Trudeau named Dr. Jane Philpott Canada's new health minister.

The 54-year-old physician and mother of four represents the Toronto-area riding of Markham-Stouffville.

Minister Philpott worked in Niger Republic, West Africa from 1989 to 1998, where she practiced general medicine and helped to develop a training program for village health workers. She returned to Canada in 1998, joining the Markham Stouffville Hospital as a family physician, and served as Chief of the Department of Family Medicine from 2008 to 2014. She is the founder of Give a Day to World AIDS, a movement that has raised over \$4 million to help those affected by HIV/AIDS in Africa.

"I became a physician so I could devote myself to helping individuals and their families to have health and meaningful lives. Now, I have become engaged in politics with the goal of helping to build a healthier society."

CFNU President Linda Silas met Minister Philpott at a welcome reception for the opening of the House on December 3, 2015.

Read more about Dr. Philpott [here](#).

“

I think health-care providers do bring a special perspective to the role, and obviously having been involved in health care delivery is going to be very helpful in terms of understanding that part of the health care system.

- Dr. Jane Philpott
Interview with *Macleans*

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On Philpott's Plate

The key areas outlined in Prime Minister Trudeau's [Mandate Letter](#) to Dr. Philpott include the new Health Accord, home care services, digital health technology, pharmacare, mental health services, vaccination strategies, food and tobacco labelling, marijuana legalization and regulation, Nutrition North expansion, and concussion awareness and treatment strategies.

Here is a list of six hot-button issues and election pledges made by the Liberal government that Minister Philpott will take on in the coming months:

1. Syrian Refugee Health Care

At the beginning of November Minister Philpott was named chair of the cabinet ad hoc committee to co-ordinate government efforts to resettle over 25,000 Syrian refugees in Canada, with 10,000 arriving before the end of the year, and 15,000 more by the end of February 2016. More on Syrian refugee health care continued read on page 7.

2. Renewal of Health Accord

In the coming months Minister Philpott will work with the provinces to negotiate a new multi-year Health Accord and determine a long-term strategy for federal health transfer funding. In an interview with the [National Post](#) Philpott acknowledged that "health care delivery" is in the domain of provinces and territories, but added that it is the role of the federal government to show leadership and set the tone of health priorities for Canadians.

3. Pharmacare

The Liberals have pledged to improve access and reduce the costs of prescription drugs. However, there was no actual plan laid out to create a national prescription drug program. The Liberals continue to feel the pressure from health care stakeholders to implement a national prescription drug plan. On November 17, an open letter to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau published in the [Toronto Star](#), signed by more than 300 health professionals and academics, stated that pharmacare is the 'unfinished business of the Canadian health care system.'

4. Safe Seniors Strategy

The Liberals committed \$3 billion in funding for home care over the next four years and \$20 billion in social infrastructure with a priority on investing in seniors' facilities, including long-term care.

5. Physician-Assisted Death

The Liberals face the issue of developing a federal legislative response to the 2015 Supreme Court decision in *Carter v. Canada* (Attorney General) regarding physician-assisted death (PAD). Parliament was given one year to work on the legislation. With the February 2016 deadline looming, the government will be looking to a joint parliamentary committee with members of the House of Commons and the Senate to prepare expedited legislative recommendations for the government.

6. Legalizing Marijuana

Minister Philpott must also take on the Liberal pledge to legalize the recreational use of marijuana for adults in Canada. In the coming months Philpott will establish a federal - provincial/territorial task force with public health, substance abuse and public safety experts on this complex issue. In a recent interview with [CBC News](#), Minister Philpott said: "the world is going to be looking to Canada to make sure we do the job well."

"Ensuring universal access to medically necessary prescription drugs is not only the ethical thing to do, it can also be the economically responsible thing to do."

- Open letter to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau signed by more than 300 health professionals and academics



Syrian Refugee Health Care

Background

In 2011, the civil war in Syria led millions to flee their homes and over four million to become refugees, with many settling in neighbouring countries.

In early September, when images surfaced of three-year old Aylan Kurdi's body washed ashore on the beaches of Turkey, it brought home the tragic realities of the Syrian war and refugee crisis. The Kurdi family's devastating story of loss prompted long overdue outrage from people watching around the world, and pressure for world leaders to take action and offer refuge to Syrian refugees.

Liberal leader Justin Trudeau vowed that if he was voted Canada's next prime minister he would bring over 25,000 Syrian refugees to Canada by the end of the calendar year.

The Government of Canada's Plan

In late November, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Minister John McCallum announced that the deadline had been pushed to ensure that things were done right for the health, safety and well-being of the refugees. The government's priority for resettlement are those at greatest risk: Syrian families, vulnerable women, and the members of the LGBT community.

The government will continue efforts to resettle over 25,000 Syrian refugees in Canada, with 10,000 arriving before the end of the year, and 15,000 more by the end of February 2016. The government also announced plans to expand the original resettlement promise to 35,000 refugees, with the additional 10,000 persons arriving later next year.

Current Health Status

Over the last several weeks, refugee health concerns have been raised by health care workers across Canada, and prep work is already underway to ensure the health, safety and protection of all refugees once they arrive on Canadian soil.

CFNU President Linda Silas participated in advisory committee meeting earlier this month to support and discuss the health care concerns of Syrian refugees arriving in Canada.

"Canada's Nurses are committed to doing everything that we can on the front lines to ensure that Syrian refugees of all ages and varying health backgrounds receive quality, safe patient care once they arrive in our health care facilities," said CFNU President Linda Silas.



Photo source: Citizenship & Immigration Canada

In an interview with [CTV News](#) Health Minister Philpott has said refugees will be processed overseas, including undergoing a full international medical exam that is required for all immigrants and refugees coming to Canada as set by the Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC).

Once arriving in Canada they will undergo further screening for infectious diseases, such as tuberculosis, though rates are expected to be low. A priority will be made to ensure that all refugees have access to basic medical health care that many have not received for years, including a focus on immunizations.

According to the Public Health Agency of Canada, since 2011, conflict has become the top cause of death, nearly half of the country does not have access to clean water, and vaccination rates have dropped below 50 per cent. Over 7.6 million Syrians have been displaced, increasing their vulnerability to infectious disease outbreaks.

Other issues include refugees forced to endure unsanitary and overcrowded living conditions with limited access to food, water, and little protection from environmental elements, all of which may result in negative health impacts. The Public Health Agency of Canada has stressed that arrival of Syrian refugees does not pose a health risk to Canadians.

Health concerns upon arrival

The Government of Canada and health care stakeholders are focused on providing Syrian refugees with basic health care such as immunizations, and treating chronic diseases and mental health issues due to years of displacement and prolonged exposure to conflict and trauma.

To learn more about the Government of Canada's plan to welcome Syrian refugees, or for information on how you can get involved, visit [#WelcomeRefugees](#).



#WelcomeRefugees



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