

Appearance before the Senate Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology

Study on Bill S-209, An Act respecting Pandemic Observance Day

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Thank you Chair and Committee members for the opportunity to appear before you today.

I am Dr. Katharine Smart. I am appearing before you from the traditional territory of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation and the Ta'an Kwäch'än Council.

I am pediatrician based in the Yukon. As President of the Canadian Medical Association, it's an honour to represent physicians and medical learners from all jurisdictions.

This role is even more meaningful at a time when the country so clearly sees the impacts of the pandemic on a health care system and a health workforce that have been overstretched for years.

I am pleased to add the CMA's support for a Pandemic Observance Day. This is an opportunity to reflect on everything we've lived through, the impact it has had on every aspect of our lives and the lessons we must learn from this experience to build a better tomorrow.

The federal government has played an instrumental role in Canada's pandemic response, with CMA staunchly supporting the many federal actions taken since the onset of the pandemic.

As we enter the third year of the pandemic, we continue to look for federal leadership. This is a pivotal moment – not just to stabilize health care in Canada, but to reframe it.

Patients and providers are bearing the brunt of the shortages, structural issues and regulatory barriers that have long plagued our health systems. We are in the depths of a health workforce crisis. Each wave leaves us flailing under deepening levels of backlogs with even greater workforce and system impacts.

Physician burnout is at an all time high. Preliminary results from the CMA's National Physician Health Survey reveals that 53% of physicians report high levels of burnout, nearly double pre-pandemic levels. Further, 46% told us they are either likely or very likely to reduce clinical hours in the next 24 months, with an additional 18% considering it.

The state of the health workforce will greatly impact Canadians' ability to access the care they need, now and in the future.

We know that the premiers are focused on an increase in unconditional federal dollars.

The CMA is calling for more strategic federal investments to support rebuilding and reforming health care delivery in Canada.

- First, we need federal leadership for pan-Canadian, integrated health human resources planning. Health workforce challenges have escalated beyond what any province can manage alone. An intergovernmental approach, led by the federal government is now required.

- Second, it's time to deliver on the promise to increase patient access to family doctors and primary care teams by delivering on the \$3.2 billion commitment. Scaling up collaborative, inter-professional primary care is central to increasing access to care.
- Third, we need to eliminate barriers for medical professionals by enabling the adoption of pan-Canadian licensure. Medical professionals need to be able to move from province to province to help deliver care where it's needed.

These actions by the federal government are crucial to rebuilding the foundation of health care in Canada. Whether or not they are implemented will determine how we look back on the lives we've affected in the coming years.

Future Pandemic Observance Days can remember a time when we seized a moment to collectively address a systemic cascade of hardship and worked to breathe life back into health care. We know the government cares. We rely on it to help us to supply and provide care.

Thank you, Chair.