



# Canadian Healthcare Association

## Association canadienne des soins de santé

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July 21, 2010

The Honourable Tony Clement, P.C., M.P.  
Minister of Industry  
C.D. Howe Building  
235 Queen Street  
Ottawa, Ontario  
K1A 0H5

Re: Decision to replace Canada's long-form census questionnaire with a voluntary survey

Dear Minister Clement:

I write on behalf of Canada's only federation of provincial and territorial health associations and organizations. We represent every facet of the many health systems across the country.

Collectively, we are gravely concerned about the recent decision to replace the long-form census questionnaire with the voluntary National Household Survey. To date, we have placed our support behind the many letters sent to you with detailed objections to this proposed action. We are perplexed that the government has not been moved to reconsider its direction, and thus add our vast and influential voice to the mounting wave of discontent.

While perhaps repetitive of the many expert assessments you already have received, our concerns can be articulated as follows. CHA believes that it will be increasingly difficult to develop high quality policies and programs for the citizens of this country if researchers and others are unable to track the many indicators previously afforded us through the long-form census. Currently, 95 percent of households return the long-form census questionnaire; the return rate on the planned voluntary household survey is projected to be far below that "gold standard", as well as lacking in important demographics. Beyond the population as a whole, groups including new immigrants, those of low-income and Aboriginal Canadians may not be represented in the new survey data as evidence indicates they are less likely to complete the longer forms.

Loss of the information gathered by the long-form census questionnaire will result in considerable data gaps down the road, likely affecting future population health planning. Very importantly, voluntary reporting may introduce data bias in the information, may not allow comparison with data obtained in past censuses and will hinder trend tracking. How will we be able to ensure that data which Canada provides to agencies such as OECD is valid, appropriate, defensible, relevant and complete?

Census data assists health organizations and governments in making sound policy recommendations. In fact, CHA in its briefs to House of Commons Committees including the

Standing Committees on Finance (pre-budget brief), Industry, Health as well as Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, uses detailed census data and other data from Statistics Canada to ensure that our recommendations are supported by credible research and data.

As Canada and the rest of the world consider the impact of social determinants of health, the need for accurate, reliable data and trend analysis becomes increasingly important. This information is not only useful at an international and national level, but also at community levels since it provides decision makers with direction on the services required by their community.

As we approach the end of the 2004 Accord and deliberations for a new agreement on transfer payments in 2014 begin, new models for funding health transfers to the provinces and territories will undoubtedly be explored. It is vital that reliable and detailed population data, such as the data collected via the long-form census questionnaire, be available to support governments and stakeholders when planning and funding the future of Canada's health system.

In summary, this precipitous decision to impoverish our data banks will disadvantage the health and well-being of the nation. We urge you to reconsider the impact of your current position.

We would be pleased to meet, as your schedule permits, to discuss this issue further. Please contact me at [chapresident@cha.ca](mailto:chapresident@cha.ca) or at 613-241-8005 ext. 246 to arrange a meeting.

Sincerely,



Pamela C. Fralick, MA, ICD.D  
President and CEO

C.c.: The Honourable Leona Aglukkaq, P.C., M.P., Minister of Health  
The Honourable John Baird, P.C., M.P., Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and  
Communities  
The Honourable Marjory LeBreton, Government Leader in the Senate