

Politicians must bridge divide, address health care in election

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All recent public opinion polls indicate that Canadians place health among their top three priorities. Yet health is noticeably absent from current debate among candidates and party leaders.

It is time for that to change. Health is indeed a federal issue. In this country, health is a shared federal/provincial/territorial responsibility, with the federal government playing a vital role in providing adequate funding and fostering consensus on pan-Canadian objectives.

Canadians need strong federal leadership on issues such as the ageing population, climate change, food safety, pandemic preparation, ensuring an adequate supply and distribution of health human resources, population health, public/private funding and delivery, sustainability of the health system, and the health status of First Nations. Furthermore, the federal government must address Canadians' rising expectations regarding transparency and accountability in the health system as well as their concerns about patient safety.

Federal leadership is also needed to make electronic health records a reality for all Canadians. For instance, only 23 percent of our family doctors have electronic health record systems. That is a very small percentage compared to the Netherlands, which has 98 percent, New Zealand, with 92 percent, and the United Kingdom, with 89 percent. Canada Health Infoway requires ongoing federal support to remedy this situation.

So far in this election campaign, a serious disconnect exists between the voice of the people and the discourse of candidates. It is time for politicians to bridge this divide and address the federal role in health — both in this campaign and the next Parliament. Canadians deserve no less.

Sincerely,

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