

# Want Info? Time to Email "Fred"



by **Adrienne Silnicki**

Welcome to Stephen Harper's Canada, where hiding books from the government just became an act of civil disobedience.

The federal Conservative government recently shut down health science libraries so abruptly that some Health Canada workers have resorted to hiding books and journals at unsanctioned libraries off-site, including one that was set up in an employee's basement to save irreplaceable health research. The research library can now be accessed by emailing "Fred."

The road to steamrolling Health Canada's libraries was paved with strategic potholes. The government created the conditions that made the information inaccessible, unaffordable, and extremely slow to arrive. Health Canada Library Services cut its staff from 36 in 2008-09 to just six in 2013-14. However, operating costs rose to \$2.67 million from \$1.75 million, thanks to outsourcing, privatization and ridiculous processing fees. On top of this, there is now a retrieval fee of \$25.65, a \$9 fee for scanning, and a copyright fee of between \$4 and \$8 per document, which Health Canada has to pay.

The government can now say that the status quo – which it created – isn't working. But instead of returning it to the way it was before privatization, the entire program was axed.

Sound familiar? It should.



Members of the Council of Canadians' Hamilton chapter joined with other organizations to rally for a new health care accord on March 31.

From killing the long-form census to muzzling government scientists, there's no denying the fact that the Harper government has declared war on evidence.

In addition to Health Canada cuts, we've also witnessed the loss of the Health Council of Canada (HCC). The HCC reported on the implementation of the objectives coming out of the 2004 Health Accord. Since the Harper government has no intention of signing a 2014 Health Accord, why would it need the HCC?

However, without evidence to show the successes and failures of the provinces in implementing the accord, how do we know what is working in our health care system and what requires improvement? How do we have an informed debate on health care?

The government is killing the evidence now so that we cannot ask questions later. The purpose of these recent cuts to Health Canada libraries boils down to one word: control.

The reason for this need for control of information should be clear to everyone by now. From the tar sands to fracking to water pollution to abandoning the health accord and slashing the increase to the Canada health transfer by nearly 50 per cent, this government knows that its policies are detrimental to the well-being of people and the environment. But it doesn't want us to know how the policies are damaging our lives.

Prime Minister Harper is doing everything he can to surgically remove these facts from the realm of debate.

The gutting of Health Canada, health research, and the HCC is all part of the Conservatives' systematic abandonment of health care. The federal government wants to abdicate its responsibilities and has already jettisoned health care for refugees and RCMP officers and veterans' long-term care onto the provinces and territories.

Then the government slashed the Canada Health Transfer by nearly 50 per cent – a loss of \$36 billion for the provinces and territories – and ended equalization payments. It's no wonder provincial and territorial premiers have had enough.

Canadians, too, have had enough. We were promised in 2004 that a national pharmacare program was in the works, and that we would have better access to health care services and shorter wait times. During the first few years of the health accord this happened. But since 2006 we've been moving further from our goals of a stronger universal health care system and closer to an uneven patchwork of public coverage and privatization.

Until we defeat Harper's agenda, we're going to need many more "Fredes."

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