



by **Adrienne Silnicki**

Why Won't Premiers Defend Public Health Care?

Canada's national health care deal is about to disappear.

We have less than one year to negotiate the 2014 Health Accord. The accord is an agreement between the federal government and provincial and territorial governments that prescribes funding and health care service delivery agreements. It is set to expire in March 2014 and must be renegotiated. The federal government is ignoring the calls of the provinces and territories to work on a deal and, shockingly, announced \$36 billion worth of health care cuts that will come into effect after the next federal election in 2015.

The premiers should be outraged at the \$36 billion in cuts. They should be upset over the repeated downloading of federal responsibilities for health

care that includes the health care systems for members of the RCMP and for refugees, as well as veterans' long-term care.

But if the premiers object to the cuts, they're not speaking out publicly.

The Council of the Federation

Premiers came together for the Council of the Federation meeting in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario, in July. Thousands of people marched through the streets to the gate of the premiers' conference to deliver a strong message that Canadians value public health care. They called on the premiers to defend public health care by standing up to the federal government and saying "no" to the cuts.

The rally and march came after hundreds of people from across the country

crowded into a small church down the street from the premiers and spent the day participating in workshops and town-halls, learning more about the accord and the state of health care in Canada.

At the end of the week premiers held a press conference. P.E.I. Premier Robert Ghiz reported on the progress of the premier-led health innovation working group, and announced the slight expansion of a bulk purchasing plan for drugs that the premiers have been working on.

One journalist asked: "Premier Ghiz, there are 13 premiers around the table talking about saving millions by bulk purchasing drugs, but if we wanted to save billions by introducing a national pharmacare program, who else would need to be at the table?"



Thousands of people took part in a public forum, workshop and rally in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario as premiers met for the Council of the Federation meeting in July.



The answer is the federal government. The federal government would need to be at the table to create a national pharmacare program. Instead of answering, however, Premier Ghiz ignored the query and moved on to another question.

Provinces and territories cannot afford more cuts

So why are the premiers refusing to ask the federal government for fair federal funding of health care? Medicare used to be funded through a 50-50 cost-sharing plan between the federal government and the provinces and territories. Today, the provinces cover 80 per cent of health care costs. This amount will increase when the federal government's funding cuts are implemented in its 2016/2017 budget.

Without federal leadership, public health care is losing its national cohesion. Increasingly we are seeing a patchwork of services and delivery times. The Canada Health Act's assurance of comprehensive, portable, universal, accessible health care is disappearing. Conversations with premiers reveal that it's clear they're worried about making too much noise and suf-

fering further financial cuts in other areas. There's a real fear for provinces and territories that the federal government will make more devastating cuts to the Canada Social Transfer, which helps pay for social services and education, employment insurance and other programs. Smaller, less wealthy provinces simply can't afford to have more taken away.

What can we do?

The Council of Canadians and CUPE are working together to launch a campaign to fight against the \$36 billion in health care cuts and push for a health accord that creates national standards and equality of health care services across Canada.

The campaign is being piloted in Prince Edward Island and British Columbia this fall. Activities include workshops with Council activists, CUPE, HEU and other union members, provincial health coalition members and community allies; public townhalls with national and local speakers; door-to-door canvassing in vulnerable federal Conservative ridings; and a community festival to celebrate Canada's 50-plus years of medicare.

At the workshops participants will learn about the 2014 Health Accord – what it is, what it does, and why we need a new one. They'll receive training on how to talk to their friends, family and community about the accord. Then we will hit the sidewalks and conduct door-to-door canvassing to talk to people about what the abdication of the federal Conservative government from health care means for them and for their community.

We are encouraging members of the public to be involved in the call for federal leadership on a 2014 Health Accord. We need the Harper government to take responsibility for health care expenditures, the creation of national standards, and the expansion of public health care into new areas such as pharmacare, home and community care, dental care, and mental health care.

By working together for a 2014 Health Accord, we can make health care better for everyone.

Adrienne Silnicki is the Health Care Campaigner for the Council of Canadians. If you have ideas or suggestions for this campaign, please email Adrienne at asilnicki@canadians.org.