



August 31, 2020

The Rt. Hon. Justin Trudeau, P.C., M.P.
Office of the Prime Minister
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Re: Recommendations in advance of Speech from the Throne

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau,

On behalf of the College of Family Physicians of Canada (CFPC) and its 40,000 members we would like to thank you for the federal government's ongoing work throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. The government's continuing investment in virtual care, increased supply of personal protective equipment (PPE) as well as support of vaccine development and preparation are commendable.

We particularly appreciate the work of the Public Health Agency of Canada and the leadership of Dr. Theresa Tam during this time, maintaining strong engagement with health professional organizations, seeking input and relaying information in a timely manner.

We are writing to provide **recommendations in advance of the upcoming Speech from the Throne**, to encourage continued progress containing COVID-19 and mitigating adverse effects on health and well-being of all, across Canada.

The exceptional situation created by the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted vulnerable communities as well as those whose circumstances put them at risk of infection or experiencing barriers to care. Those groups include seniors living in long-term care facilities, Indigenous people, Black communities, as well as people experiencing adverse social determinants of health such as homelessness and poverty. The efforts of many front-line health providers, including our family physician members should be recognized and supported through dedicated investments.

The following recommendations should ensure that Canada is well-positioned for a strong recovery in the wake of COVID and all in Canada receive high quality care.

1. Ensure ongoing pandemic preparedness through investments in PPE availability, mental health support and virtual care expansion.

Physicians across Canada adapted to new ways of providing care including expanded options for virtual appointments and new infection control protocols for family practice clinics. A [survey](#) of CFPC members conducted in May 2020 confirmed that:

- 89% are contacting patients at home by phone, email, or other method
- 88% have increased the cleaning and sterilization of their office space and equipment
- 87% are increasing their use of PPE
- 83% are changing waiting areas to make them safer.

It is imperative that family physicians continue to be supported through federal investments that enable them to meet safe practice guidelines, including a reliable supply of PPE. The provision of virtual care must also be supported through cutting edge technology and remuneration policies that make virtual care a viable option for providers economically and no matter where they practice in Canada.

As the demand for counselling and mental health supports increases, the federal government has an important role, including expansion of public coverage for mental health services to increase access for marginalized groups not covered by provincial insurance plans.

2. Strengthening of Canada's primary care

Your government has prioritized access to a family doctor. We strongly support your work in this area as the benefits of having one's own [family physician](#) are well-documented. Currently, nearly 5 million people in Canada do not have a regular health care provider. We strongly recommend that you continue supporting this priority by [allocating funding to strengthening primary care across Canada](#), promising alignment with the [Patient's Medical Home](#) vision supported by our valued colleagues from the Canadian Medical Association, Canadian Nurses Association and the Canadian Association of Social Workers.

Patients in long-term care homes as well as Indigenous communities urgently need federal support to improve health care outcomes and be provided with high-quality care.

3. The need for universal Pharmacare

Canada continues to be the only developed country with a universal health care system that does not feature universal coverage of prescription drugs. More than 1 in 5 Canadians forego necessary medication because of cost concerns, resulting in adverse effects on population health and driving up health system demands and costs. Your government pledged to provide access to prescription drugs regardless of financial status. We strongly encourage you to maintain this commitment and advance the work towards [a universal national pharmacare program](#).

We hope that these priorities will be reflected in the upcoming Speech from the Throne. Canada's family physicians are ready to contribute their efforts and knowledge to deliver and support high-quality care for all in Canada.

Sincerely,



Shirley Schipper, MD, CCFP, FCFP
President



Francine Lemire, MD CM, CCFP, FCFP, CAE, ICD.D
Executive Director and CEO

cc: The Hon. Chrystia Freeland, P.C., M.P., Minister of Finance
The Hon. Patty Hajdu, P.C., M.P., Minister of Health
The Hon. Deb Schulte, P.C., M.P., Minister of Seniors
Dr. Theresa Tam, Chief Public Health Officer, Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC)
Ms. Marilyn Gladu, M.P., Conservative Health Critic
Mr. Don Davies, M.P., NDP Health Critic