

Media release
For immediate delivery

Global gathering will address best practices in Primary Health Care

-Conference in Toronto will explore the Community Health Centre solution-

(TORONTO - June 1, 2011) - Experts from around the world will travel to Toronto next week to attend *Community Health Centres: Acting Today, Shaping Tomorrow*, a conference focused on improving population health and increasing the sustainability of health care systems. The conference will focus on the unique role of Community Health Centres (CHCs) in transforming Primary Health Care, a growing hot button concern for policymakers around the world.

Community Health Centres are known globally for their success delivering comprehensive primary health care, or community-oriented primary care and are fast emerging as the model of choice in countries such as Belgium, Australia, the Netherlands and South Africa. In the United States where CHCs are undergoing a significant expansion, their innovative approach receives strong bi-partisan support from both Republicans and Democrats.

The conference will take place on June 9 and 10 at the Westin Harbour Castle on the Toronto lakefront and will catch the attention of policy makers urgently seeking to improve quality of care, reduce health disparities and bend the health care cost curve.

Conference delegates from around the world will share best practices in applying the CHC model which combines primary care services with a wide range of other health promotion and community development programs. "Canada needs to recognize this global trend and fix our current system now in an affordable and sustainable way," said Adrianna Tetley, Executive Director of the Association of Ontario Health Centre, one of the three organizations behind the conference. "This conference is designed to kick start the process."

Ontario is currently a leader implementing the CHC solution in Canada with a total of 73 centres scattered throughout the province, yet this is only enough to serve four per cent of the population. During the conference, the Association of Ontario Health Centres will issue a formal call for Ontario's next provincial government to enable 250,000 more people to access CHC services.

Even more urgent action is needed in other provinces. "Better health is much more than access to a doctors' office, hospital or pharmacy," says Jack McCarthy, Chair of the Canadian Alliance of Community Health Centre Associations. "More Canadians need to access to health teams that design services which respond to what's happening in families, homes, schools, and the communities where people live and work."

During the two day conference there will be a special focus on improving the health of populations most at risk, particularly those living in poverty. Statistics show lower income groups use the system twice as much as higher income Canadians. Poverty is also strongly linked with chronic disease and other adverse health outcomes.

Speakers include:

- **U.S. Senator Bernard Sanders**, who led the successful effort to grow the U.S. CHC system to reach 40 million people by 2015, as part of that country's recent health reform initiative.

- **Jan de Maeseneer**, Chairperson of the European Forum for Primary Care who will speak on global trends in the adoption of community-oriented health care delivery.

- **Dr. Jack Geiger**, the founder of Community Health Center movement in the United States.

- Medicare champion, **Roy Romanow** who will be speaking on the importance of the social determinants of health and the new Canadian Index of Wellbeing.

"Health centres from every nation have so much to share with each other, and learn from each other," said Dan Hawkins, policy director for the U.S. National Association of Community Health Centres, another conference presenter. "I know CHC representatives from the U.S. look forward to learning best practices from their colleagues in Canada and around the world."

Also speaking will be **Ontario's Minister of Health and Long-term Care, Deb Matthews**, former federal NDP health critic **Megan Leslie**, and newly appointed federal NDP health critic **Libby Davies**.

The two day conference is being sponsored by the Association of Ontario Health Centres, the Canadian Alliance of Community Health Centre Associations and the U.S.-based National Association of Community Health Centres. Conference registrants include CHC representatives from Canada and the United States, regional and provincial policymakers from across Canada, primary health care leaders from around the world as well as community groups in Ontario who are calling for access to CHC services.

Leading up to the conference, global discussions are taking place on Twitter (#CHC2011) and Facebook

<http://www.facebook.com/CHCs.ActingTodayShapingTomorrow> and will continue throughout the conference. Real time coverage can be found at <http://actingtodayshapingtomorrow.posterous.com> . Background information on the conference can be found at www.aohc.org/conference .

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