

## NEWS RELEASE

### For Immediate Distribution

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# Health agencies call on world's governments to bolster health system response to causes of illness

## Effective primary health care services described as key to success

This week, government officials, researchers, health agencies and civil society groups from around the world are gathering in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, for a global conference focused on root causes of illness and mortality around the world. The distinguished meeting in Brazil puts *social causes* of illness up front and centre – factors such as poverty, inadequate housing, food insecurity, social violence and the lack of access to appropriate health care that have been demonstrated, through global research, to account for the lion's share of preventable illness and death around the globe.

The three-day *World Conference on Social Determinants of Health* builds on, and is a direct outcome of a landmark global report issued, in 2008, by an international expert commission on the “social determinants of health”. The commission was convened by the World Health Organization (WHO) and chaired by the eminent British physician, Sir Michael Marmot.

In the lead up to the global meeting in Brazil, a major grouping of health services associations from Canada, the United States and Europe is calling on governments around the world to connect the dots between health and health care. The Canadian Alliance of Community Health Centre Associations (CACHCA), the European Forum for Primary Care (EFPC), and the United States National Association of Community Health Centers (NACHC) are urging Heads of State, Ministers of Health and other leaders to include within their commitments at the conference an emphasis on improving frontline, primary health care services as a key health system response to the complex factors that engender health for some, and illness for others.

In addition to encouraging the world's governments to earnestly explore policy mechanisms and agreements that will reduce local and global poverty, improve access to food and shelter, and improve other inputs for health, NACHC, EFPC and CACHCA are specifically recommending that governments focus attention on improving access to community-oriented primary health care, a level of services and a type of locally-based care and support most often known through local health organizations called Community Health Centres (CHCs). The core characteristics of this Community Health Centre model of care, support and capacity-building include:

- A team-based approach to primary health care, including collaborative, patient-centred care delivered by diverse health promotion and healthcare professionals, based on their availability within the context of a local health system; and

- A holistic approach to health and health care, where clinical primary care services are integrated with individual and group health promotion programs and community health initiatives, in alignment with World Health Organization (WHO) definitions of “health” and “primary health care”; and
- An emphasis on illness prevention and mitigation, including commitment to addressing the broader “social determinants of health”; and
- A commitment to equity and social inclusion as guiding principles for action in health promotion and delivery of health care; and
- A strong emphasis on local, community engagement and civic participation in health and health care, often including community and client/patient participation in governance of local health care organizations.

For more information about Community Health Centres (CHCs) and community-oriented primary health care in Canada, the United States, Europe and around the world, please visit:

- Community Health Centres: Acting Today, Shaping Tomorrow: <http://www.facebook.com/CHCs.ActingTodayShapingTomorrow>
- Canadian Alliance of Community Health Centre Associations: [www.cachca.ca](http://www.cachca.ca)
- European Forum for Primary Care: [www.euprimarycare.org](http://www.euprimarycare.org)
- National Association of Community Health Centers: [www.nachc.org](http://www.nachc.org)

## Quotes:

### Dr. Jan De Maeseneer

#### Chairman - European Forum for Primary Care

“As a practicing family physician, a professor of medicine, and a long-time contributor to health system reform efforts around the globe, I have time and again seen how the qualities of a Community Health Centre approach have the potential to radically improve health, health care and social wellbeing. Certainly, here in Europe, we believe that governments need to move quickly in reforming the way that primary care services are organized and funded – toward interprofessional, team-based care and toward funding for integrated programs, within community health centres, that help improve individual, family and community solidarity, equity and health. Community Health Centres in Belgium, Spain, Netherlands and several other EU countries have already provided a model for what this health system solution could look like, and the European Forum for Primary Care is working to help improve access to this innovative, community-oriented primary health care approach across Europe.”

“However, the need for this reformed approach to first line health and health care is not limited to the wealthier countries of Europe and other regions. The Community Health Centre approach is applicable in all settings. One might argue that because it focuses on preventing illness, on implementing locally-relevant and community-led solutions to health challenges, and on bringing together the available health care providers into a team setting, the CHC model is perhaps the only reliable way that resource-poor countries will ever be able to reverse the overwhelming odds that are faced within and by their fragile health systems.”

## **Dan Hawkins**

### **Senior Vice President of Policy and Research**

#### **National Association of Community Health Centers**

“At a time of growing economic concern, here in the United States and around the globe, it is more important than ever that governments make smart investments in programs and services that not only keep people healthy, but also prevent the skyrocketing costs that result from illness and lost productivity. In the United States, due to recent roadblocks within the United States Congress, over 30 million Americans are still without access to the local, prevention-based care and support that America’s Community Health Center network is ready to provide. In communities where these local health centers have already been funded, they are not only boosting the health of our population, they are providing a sparkplug for local economic recovery and development. What better time in our country’s history than now to turn the switch on this solution. The United States Congress has the ability, right now, to turn on this switch and to bring this local health center sparkplug to communities across America, for the sake of our health and our economic recovery.”

“But we also know that the gap in access to this sort of frontline Community Health Center solution is one that other nations face as well, and in countries that are both poorer and richer. We join in urging governments everywhere to carefully consider the triple bottom-line solution that Community Health Centers provide: improved health, reduced overall health system costs, and increased local economic development.”

## **Dr. Jane Moloney**

### **Chairperson - Canadian Alliance of Community Health Centre Associations**

“Canada has long been regarded as a beacon for progress around many aspects of health and health care, but this position at home and on a global stage is now in question. Our cherished, publicly-funded health system is at a crossroads and many of the indicators of health and equity for Canadians have taken an alarming, negative turn over the past decade as investment in social services and inputs for health have been eroded. There has perhaps never been a better opportunity for Canada to demonstrate leadership, and to regain our solid footing at home and abroad, than in showcasing our country’s commitments to health and health care at a world gathering such as the one in Brazil.”

“As part of Canada’s contribution to global progress on health and wellbeing, it’s critical for our government to underscore its continuing commitment to Canada’s publicly-funded, universal health system and to spearhead cooperation with Canada’s provinces and territories to improve access to local, community-based primary health care. By making clear the federal government’s role and by setting targets for closing the gap in access to Community Health Centre services for Canadian families and communities, the Government of Canada can improve the health of Canadians and help model this global solution for individual, family and community health. An extension of this commitment at home into Canada’s global partnerships and international development frameworks has the further potential to usher in a renewed era of global cooperation and progress on health.”

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