

**Opening Remarks
for Kamal Khera**

**Parliamentary Secretary to the
Minister of Health**

**At the Canadian Health
Human Resources Network's
*Canadian Health Workforce Conference***

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Good morning and thank you for that warm introduction.

On behalf of the federal Minister of Health, Dr. Jane Philpott, I would like to thank the Canadian Health Human Resources Network for the opportunity to open your 2nd Annual Conference.

As I stand before you today, I am very proud of Canada's health care system, its global reputation, and the incredible people who work within it.

As a former registered nurse, I have seen first-hand the great work our doctors, nurses and health care practitioners perform everyday.

We are witnessing the tremendous benefits of government investments in promoting healthier, more stable workplace environments.

Those are the kinds of investments the World Health Organization is urging all OECD countries to continue.

Across OECD countries, employment in health and social work grew by 48% between 2000 and 2014.

Here in Canada, our own health care system is very labour-intensive. In 2014, the professional health and social service sector employed more than 2 million Canadians.

We recognize that there's an important link between health and the strength of the health workforce.

In order to achieve a *healthy* health workforce, we need an adequate supply of employees, the right mix of talent, and the proper distribution of health professionals.

Unfortunately, we are working within an expensive and disjointed health care system that does not result in better health outcomes for patients.

That's not a reflection on the quality of care that's delivered. Canadians get excellent hospital and medical care.

Our institutions are world renowned for research, for training, and for the provision of specialty care.

But we need to think about how that care is provided, how it's delivered, and the extent to which systems incorporate all the available options.

Health care in Canada has changed a lot. Forty years ago, nearly 60% of Canada's health spending went to hospitals and doctors.

Today, that's down to 45%.

But despite the fact that the needs in our health care system have changed along with associated spending patterns, the way governments prioritize their health budgets has not.

Most public health care funding still goes to support hospital and physician services, while other services make do with a patchwork of limited public funding, private insurance and out-of-pocket payment.

Meanwhile, the demand for prescription drugs, long-term care, home care, and mental health supports keeps going up.

I don't find that surprising. Our population is aging, people are living longer, and chronic diseases are on the rise.

Patients, health service providers, policy makers and members of the general public are all, understandably, concerned about how to cope with the ever-expanding demands on our health care system.

You and I, and most health policy experts would agree that Canada is way overdue for health system reform.

And the Government of Canada needs to be a player. Throughout the history of health care in our country, the Government of Canada has always played a critical role.

Our goal is to create a health system that is optimal, collaborative and efficient.

And good governments are those that listen to experts and innovators, and act on their advice.

The input from the Canadian Health Human Resources Network is grounded in facts and reason, which are the necessary basis for sound public policy.

Your members have always offered unique insights and concrete ideas on not just how we can improve sustainability and accessibility, but on how we can make the best use of our existing health care workforce.

Working smarter means using patient-centered teams of professionals, where different kinds of providers work to their full scope of practice, and where they can collaborate in real time.

Implementing change within the health system is going to take time.

When Health Ministers meet later this month in Toronto, they will be talking about shared priorities for health, including home care, pharmaceuticals, mental health, better healthcare for Indigenous Canadians, and innovation.

Innovation is a particular area where there is a strong consensus for action, and where federal investments can help drive the adoption of better business models and accelerate change.

As with any journey, there will be success and progress, along with challenges and setbacks.

So as you meet over these next couple of days, I challenge each of you to think of ways you can help us to advance these priorities.

Small ideas can blossom into positive, system-wide changes that improve productivity and optimize the health workforce.

I want you to be change agents! We can't transform our health care system by staying in our silos.

We can make a difference by working together.

Thank you once again for inviting me to speak with you all today, and please accept my best wishes for a very rewarding conference.