



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Prevent it, find it, manage it, says the Health Council of Canada
in its new report on chronic illness in Canada**

***Canada's health care system needs to transform quickly
to stem the rising tide of diabetes and other chronic health conditions***

London, ON, March 5, 2007 – Canada can and must do a better job of preventing, identifying and managing the growing prevalence of chronic diseases, according to the Health Council of Canada's inaugural report on health outcomes.

The report, *Why Health Care Renewal Matters: Lessons from Diabetes*, looks at what we know about the best ways to manage chronic conditions and measures that against the way we currently treat diseases, using type 2 diabetes as a case study. The report explores how shifting the focus of health care can have a profound, positive impact on health outcomes and on the lives of Canadians, while also helping ensure the sustainability of our health care system for future generations.

The report was released today at the London InterCommunity Health Centre, whose innovative approach to screening, managing and preventing diabetes in that city's higher-risk Latin American community is highlighted in the report alongside other encouraging chronic disease management initiatives across the country.

"The way we provide health care today leaves too many people vulnerable to serious health problems that could be avoided," said Dr. Ian Bowmer, Vice Chair of the Health Council of Canada. "If we don't support prevention and change the way we deliver care for chronic health conditions, we are not optimizing care and are putting the quality of life of Canadians at risk."

The Health Council examined research on diabetes care in Canada and around the world and concluded that we need to adopt new and better ways of delivering care, including the use of health care teams; comprehensive electronic patient records; and setting targets to improve the quality of care. We need to provide better care to high-risk populations, including First Nations people, low-income Canadians and people who belong to particular ethnic groups. And we need to coordinate sustained action on prevention.

Less than half of people with diabetes get the lab tests and procedures that experts recommend – tests that are important to help prevent serious complications. In places where people with diabetes receive care focused on preventing complications, these people are healthier, spend less time in hospital, and, ultimately, use less expensive health care.

The Health Council believes that Canada's health care system needs to move past the traditional "*find it and fix it*" approach that emphasizes short-term health care, towards a more sustainable "*prevent it, find it, manage it*" approach that integrates high quality health care and prevention.

One in three Canadians have a chronic health condition, and type 2 diabetes affects at least 1.3 million Canadians, plus hundreds of thousands more are unaware that they have the condition. Type 2 diabetes is also a largely preventable disease that is becoming increasingly prevalent among children and adults throughout the country, because of changes in eating and exercise habits that increase the risk of developing this disease.

Three-quarters of the people who live with diabetes also have other chronic health conditions, the Health Council found. Many suffer the serious complications typical of diabetes, such as heart disease, kidney damage, depression, loss of vision, and poor circulation which can lead to amputations. But with the right kind of health care, these health problems – which reduce the quality of life for people with diabetes and drive up the cost of their health care – can be forestalled or prevented, the report concludes.

Screening programs and community initiatives to help people better manage diet and lifestyle choices can have a major impact on preventing or delaying the onset of disease, but we need to take action now, to stem the rising tide of diabetes and related chronic health conditions.

“The lesson is clear. People with diabetes will need less intensive, less expensive, health care in the future, if they get the right care now.” said Dr. Stanley Vollant, a Councillor with the Health Council of Canada. “The way we provide care now is piecemeal and out of date. By changing how the health system works, we can improve the well-being of Canadians and make the health care system more sustainable. Canada can do better. “

“It took a generation of hard work to see a real reduction in the number of Canadians who smoke,” said Dr. Bowmer. “We have to do the same for healthy eating and exercise to prevent chronic health conditions like diabetes. But we have to do it faster.”

In conjunction with the release of the report, the Health Council is launching a public consultation project, to hear the views of Canadians on today’s report. Online consultation begins today and runs to April 15 on the Council’s website, www.healthcouncilcanada.ca. In-person roundtables will also be held in Thunder Bay, Halifax, and Vancouver. The Council will share the results of these consultations through a public report and will integrate insights from this project in its future research on health outcomes.

The full report on health outcomes, backgrounders and other material can be downloaded at www.healthcouncilcanada.ca.

About Health Council of Canada

The Health Council of Canada, created by the 2003 First Ministers’ Accord on Health Care Renewal following the recommendations of the Romanow and Kirby reports, is mandated to monitor and report on the progress of health care renewal in Canada. The 26 Councillors were appointed by the participating provinces, territories, and the Government of Canada and have expertise and broad experience in community care, Aboriginal health, nursing, health education and administration, finance, medicine and pharmacy.

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