

Education

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For more information please contact:  
Advertising: Cheryl Lee  
cheryl@mccronehealthbeat.com  
Toll Free – Ph 1.800.727.0782

Publisher: Jan Henry, McCrone Publications  
jan@mccronehealthbeat.com

Letters & Articles: Jay Sherwood  
jay@mccronehealthbeat.com

Graphic Design: Jackie Vogt  
design@mccronehealthbeat.com

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9768 – 170 Street, #319  
Edmonton, AB T5T 5L4  
Ph: 780.413.9342 Fax: 780.413.9328  
Toll Free – Ph: 1.800.727.0782  
www.mccronehealthbeat.com



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2008 marks the centennial year for the Canadian Nurses Association (CNA). CNA is a federation of 11 provincial and territorial associations and colleges representing almost 135,000 registered nurses. Its mission as the professional voice of registered nurses is to provide support for registered nurse practice and "...advocate for healthy public policy and a quality, publicly funded, not-for-profit health system" (CNA, 2008). Since its inception in 1908, it has worked with the government of Canada in key areas such as: health policy; emergency preparedness; nursing education; and health system reform both within Canada and internationally. All of its work was and continues to be conducted and directed toward the best interests of the public.

**The past**  
For the last 100 years, the federal government has asked for CNA's help in addressing issues related to health and health care. In a short paper highlights of its partnership with government are presented in the form of a timeline. In the late 1920s CNA's Report on Nursing Service, developed at the request of the federal department of health provides information on issues and trends in nursing while referring to the difficulties in recruitment. As well, CNA developed a plan to ready registered nurses in the case of war or disaster. This was CNA's first foray into emergency preparedness. In the field of nursing education, CNA was asked to comment on the wisdom of establishing national nursing curricula in Canadian universities in the 30s and in the 40s, at the request of the federal government managed recruitment activities to address the shortage of nurses created by the Second World War.

One of the "health sector's national treasures" was created by CNA in the 1960s — The National Nursing Student and Faculty Database. Annual tabulation of issues and recruitment numbers are derived from this database and remains one of three sources of data used to understand the number of nursing students in Canada. As well, CNA was very involved in supporting the development of Medicare as a national program.

# Canadian Nurses Association: Working With Governments for Health Reform *The Past and The Future*

In the 70s, CNA's proposals for tax reform outlined a plan for tax deductions to address registered nurse retention issues. During the same decade, the federal government created a partnership with CNA to allow for participation of Canadian nurses in international development work.

Issues that CNA helped to resolve through participation in the legislative process in the 80s and 90s included: reduction of tobacco use through federal tax measures; support of the development of the Quarantine Act; support of the Canada's Child Tax Benefit; and perhaps the most evident of all, involvement and support in the development of the Canada Health Act. This Act as we all know is the foundation for the provincial publicly funded health systems in Canada.

In the early 90s while governments struggled with increasing debt and deficits, funding for health care was cut and reallocated both federally and provincially. These factors along with restructuring of health systems led to concerns about the future of the health sector workforce. CNA participated with the government in a labour market study looking at the nursing workforce and partnered with Health Canada to increase the use of research evidence in decision making in the health sector.

Since the turn of the century, CNA has continued to provide leadership in health reform on a broad scale, both alone and in collaboration with other health professional associations. As well, issues related to the shortages of nursing personnel as well as physicians and other health professionals (e.g. recruitment, retention, burnout, role clarification and the like) have and continue to be addressed. Today, at the beginning of CNA's second hundred years, strong relationships

with government and other contributors to Canadian health policy that have been established over the years will continue to serve well as CNA looks towards the future.

**The future**  
In a paper called "Vision for Change", CNA outlines plans and projects to help build our publicly-funded health system for the future. Looking forward to 2020, CNA notes that fundamental structural and institutional change is key to sustaining the health system. Aging of the baby boomers is one factor that will have significant impact on our society. As well, while it is predicted that there will be large increases in the number of people with chronic diseases, the number of professionals who provide care will decrease significantly due to retirement. Combine these facts with the notion that our world is becoming smaller allowing the right conditions for active and virulent illnesses to travel further and faster than ever before. To meet these and other challenges in the future it is imperative that health systems be radically transformed. (CNA, 2008 p.4)

Consistent with the picture of the future, CNA wants all the partners in health care to become deeply involved in the transformation by organizing and working towards the following.

- Revolutionize patient care by assuring that a comprehensive array of primary health care services is easily accessible to Canadians. Emphasis will be placed on the prevention of illness and injury and the maintenance of health and health promotion. Treatment of illness and injury will be in settings for short stay and outpatient services, critical care and emergency services.

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