



**October 7, 2014**

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The Canadian Association  
of Community Health  
Centres is the federal voice  
for Community Health  
Centres and community-  
oriented, people-centred  
primary health care across  
Canada.

**Hon. Chris Alexander, P.C., M.P.**  
**Minister of Citizenship and Immigration**  
**Citizenship and Immigration Canada**  
**Ottawa, Ontario K1A 1L1**

Dear Minister Alexander,

We are writing to you on behalf of the Canadian Association of Community Health Centres (CACHC), which represents Community Health Centres across Canada and is the voice of community-oriented, people-centred primary health care. We respectfully urge you to stop your proposed appeal of the July 4, 2014 Federal Court ruling to reverse cuts to the Interim Federal Health Program (IFHP) – (*Canadian Doctors for Refugee Care v. AG Canada*; 2014 FC 651).

Since these cuts to the IFHP were first announced in 2012, our association has warned that they not only pose an immediate threat to the health of many of the most vulnerable members of our society, but also a very serious public health and health system threat to all residents of Canada. In sum, they constitute an unconscionable morale and economic hazard for our country, and they run counter to the civic spirit and sensibilities of Canadians, and the spirit of our laws. We were encouraged to see Canada's highest court echo this in its July 4, 2014 ruling.

Since 2012, our association has stated unequivocally that the Federal Government's changes to the Interim Federal Health Program need to be reversed, and that full health coverage needs to be restored for all refugees and asylum seekers in Canada.

Community Health Centres across Canada have over five decades of experience providing care and support to refugees and asylum seekers. This experience and keen understanding of not only the precarious nature of refugee health, but also the interconnectedness of our health and social systems, caused us to believe that cuts to the IFHP portended a major crisis. Unfortunately, we were correct.

Across Canada, Community Health Centres and local service partners have reported massive confusion across health and social systems regarding coverage for refugees and asylum seekers. This has resulted not only in people being turned away from urgently needed services – often incorrectly and illegitimately – but also in added layers of bureaucracy, delays, and headaches that have affected the health and social services upon which all residents of Canada rely.



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The consequences of this crisis are dire and costly. Research at Toronto's Hospital for Sick Children, for example, has shown that admission rates for refugee children have doubled since the IFHP cuts were implemented in June 2012 (Evans, Caudarella, Ratnapalan, Chan 2014 "The cost and impact of the interim federal health program cuts on child refugees in Canada" PLoS One).

These heavy costs, in the form of personal health and avoidable burdens on health system resources, are ones that Canada cannot afford. They can easily be alleviated by fully reversing cuts made to the IFHP.

Our appeal to you today comes not only after over two years of witnessing this crisis unfold, but also on the occasion of Community Health and Wellbeing Week across Canada (October 5-11, 2014). The focus of Canadians this week is squarely on what we can do, together, to improve health and wellbeing across our great country, from coast to coast to coast.

While there remains much that we may be *unable* to do, it behooves us on the occasion of this important week to commit to doing everything that we *can* do to improve health and wellbeing. There is perhaps no clearer, no more morally-binding thing that we could do to live out the spirit of this week than to finally reverse the IFHP cuts that have had such a detrimental impact on our country and its residents.

Respectfully yours,

**Jane Moloney, PhD**  
Board Chair - Canadian Association of  
Community Health Centres  
Ottawa, Ontario

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cc: **Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe, MP** – Critic for Citizenship and Immigration, New Democratic Party of Canada  
**John McCallum, MP** – Critic for Citizenship & Immigration, Multiculturalism and Seniors, Liberal Party of Canada  
**Rona Ambrose, MP** – Minister of Health, Government of Canada  
**Libby Davies, MP** – Health Critic, New Democratic Party of Canada  
**Hedy Fry, MP** – Health Critic, Liberal Party of Canada  
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