

**Speaking Notes
Dr. John Haggie
NLMA Response to Romanow Report
November 29, 2002**

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- Welcome to NLMA House.
- The release of Commissioner Romanow's report yesterday has set the stage for a revitalization and a stabilization of Canada's most important social program, our health care system.
- The commissioner and his staff are to be commended for their work on behalf of Canadians. After 18 months and thousands of presentations, it is clear that he has heard and responded to the values, concerns and ideas of Canadians from coast to coast to coast.
- Just as Romanow has become an advocate for health care reform on behalf of Canadians, the physicians of this province will continue to advocate on behalf of their patients.
- This report is a framework for meaningful change – change that we all agree is needed. Physicians have much to offer this process – our knowledge, experience and ideas. We are a valuable resource as we move forward with innovative reforms that will benefit all Canadians. Physicians can and must play a fundamental role in the development and implementation of these changes. Physicians must be at the table at every stage.
- Commissioner Romanow's recommendations are thoughtful, forward-looking and cross a wide spectrum. Their implementation will require vision, cooperation and a commitment to change among health care providers, government and patients.
- Now, I'd like to briefly touch upon some of the report's key recommendations.
- Let me begin by saying that the NLMA supports Commissioner Romanow's recommendation to modernize the Canada Health Act by expanding coverage and the covenant to reaffirm its principles. Physicians are especially heartened by his recommendation that accountability should be added as a sixth principle. All of us deserve to know how our dollars are being spent.
- The NLMA also agrees with the need to target funding to address key areas, as identified in the report, namely home care, catastrophic drug coverage, diagnostic services, rural and remote access and primary care.
- Each of these areas is extremely important to our patients and our goal of providing quality medical services to them.
- In this province, our rapidly aging population has affected the development of an effective home care program. In addition, covering the high cost of medications continues to challenge the provincial drug plan to the detriment of our patients who rely on this program.

- Our patients are also well aware of the long waits for certain diagnostic services, particularly CAT scans and MRIs. Physicians are frustrated that patients must wait too long for important diagnostic services. Additional funding for much needed equipment, training and support staff such as technicians is long overdue.
- Recruitment and retention of physicians and other health professionals, particularly in rural and remote parts of this province, have long challenged government.
- Indeed, Commissioner Romanow has identified health human resources as an area that requires further study. Certainly, new approaches and incentives are required to meet the needs of the people of this province.
- Among the solutions are flexible recruitment and retention strategies, improved supports for health professionals and telemedicine. Memorial University has been a national leader in telehealth and telemedicine, and we must build on this strength. We support such innovative approaches to the delivery of health care.
- Primary care reform is another area in which physicians must continue to play a lead role. Continuity of care, early detection and action, and better information on needs and outcomes are important to the patients of this province and their physicians.
- In this province, the NLMA is working collaboratively with the provincial government and other health care stakeholders to develop a primary care model that best suits the needs of our patients. In fact, the first meeting of the minister's advisory committee on primary care is being held today.
- The federal government must become a more active partner if Newfoundland and Labrador is to maintain an effective health care system which delivers programs that meet national standards.
- As Commissioner Romanow has stated, Canada's health care system requires stable, predictable and long-term funding. His recommendation of an infusion of \$15 billion over the next three years would appear to go a long way toward addressing the current inadequate funding levels.
- A per capita funding model, however, will only see minimal benefits flow to this province. We believe our particular situation should be recognized through a needs-based funding model.
- The physicians of this province, as advocates for our patients, call on the Minister of Health and the Premier to actively engage in debate with their provincial counterparts and lobby the federal government to pursue health care reform. The NLMA offers its active support and assistance in this endeavor.
- We are committed to working with the province, the federal government and other health care partners to ensure that our health care system fully meets the needs of our patients. The time for diagnosis is over. It's time to start the treatment.