



**Society of Rural Physicians of Canada**  
**Société de la médecine rurale du Canada**

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### **'Rural Canadians need and deserve equitable access to health care'**

The just released Canadian Institute for Health Information's report on the health of rural Canadians shows that, generally, rural residents of Canada have higher overall mortality rates and shorter life expectancies. Rural Canadians are at increased risk for death from injuries such as motor vehicle accidents and suicide. Those living in the most rural areas are the most disadvantaged. They are more likely to die from injuries, heart disease and diabetes. Life expectancy is lower in rural areas compared with urban areas.

The president of the Society of Rural Physicians, Dr. Michael Jong says 'Rural health access has been a major concern for rural communities for more than a decade. Rural Canadians are older, poorer, sicker and more accident-prone than their urban counterparts. They make up a large part of our total population and contribute significantly to the economic output of our country. We hope our new Conservative government will respond to the desperate need to improve the health status of rural Canadians. Enhanced access to health care is a key component. Limited access is forcing rural Canadians to relocate to urban centres. From a sovereignty and self-sufficiency perspective, rural depopulation has negative, long term, economic implications for our country. Surely, our new Conservative government does not need to be reminded that it was the trust and support of their rural constituents that brought them to power. Health is the top priority for all Canadians both rural and urban. It is time that rural Canadians have a better shake at health care access.'

Canadians in rural communities often have difficulty accessing primary health care and keeping health care providers in their communities, let alone accessing diagnostic services and other more advanced treatments. In northern communities, the problems are compounded by the huge geographic area, and limited facilities in serious need of upgrading. People in rural communities also have the added burden of paying for the high cost of travel to urban centres in order to access the care they need, compounded by their loss of earning and the absence of family and social support. Problems with access to health services quite often stem from serious shortages of health care

providers for even the most basic health services.

Dealing with this issue is one of the most complex and challenging aspects of health care policy and it has been well studied. Roy Romanow, in the Commission on the Future of Health Care, chronicles how Canadians living in rural and remote communities spoke directly about their serious concerns. They spoke of the need for good health and good access to health care not only because it is essential to sustain their own quality of life, but also the quality of life in their communities. In 2003, Mr. Romanow made a number of recommendations, some of which have been addressed. From a rural health perspective, the key recommendation was for the federal government to provide targeted funding to establish a new Rural and Remote Access Fund. This recommendation has yet to be implemented. The CIHI report is another reminder of the urgent need to address the health access needs of rural Canadians.

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### **About the Society of Rural Physicians of Canada**

The Society of Rural Physicians of Canada (SRPC) is the national voice of Canadian rural physicians. Founded in 1992, the SRPC's mission is to provide leadership for rural physicians and to promote sustainable conditions and equitable health care for rural communities. On behalf of its members and the Canadian public, SRPC performs a wide variety of functions, such as developing and advocating health delivery mechanisms, supporting rural doctors and communities in crisis, promoting and delivering rural medical education, encouraging and facilitating research into rural health issues, and fostering communication among rural physicians and other groups with an interest in rural health care. The SRPC is a voluntary professional organization representing over 2,000 of Canada's rural physicians and comprising 5 regional divisions spanning the country.

Reference <http://www.srpc.ca>