



Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing
Association canadienne des écoles de sciences infirmières

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Money Makes the World go Round, and Down: Canada Faces a Return to Deficits

On January 27th, the Conservative Government of Prime Minister Stephen Harper unveiled the fine print on Canada's \$85 billion federal budget spending plans ranging from money for infrastructure projects to aid for worker training, and cash for enhanced employment insurance (EI) benefits, to help the country ride out the global economic downturn.

“The recommendations from economists are to invest in rapid infrastructure and capital projects that will live on past the current crisis but not require ongoing fiscal support,” states a Dean from a Health Sciences department in Ontario who wishes to remain anonymous.

“Examples are roads, bridges, airport improvements that will support the economy now and trade and economic development in the future. Public housing projects can work if they are ‘ready to go’.”

However, the Executive Director of the Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing, Dr. Ellen Rukholm believes, “Shovels are not enough – investment in nurse knowledge workers for the future means investment not just in ‘buildings’ but also in the infrastructure required for the nursing teachers, scholars and clinicians needed now and tomorrow. Dollars expended now on nursing education and science is an investment in the health of Canadians today and tomorrow”.

“Investments in health and nursing research and education contribute to economic renewal rather than add to the national and global deficit,” says Dr. Rukholm. “Investment in scholarships for graduate education and increased training grants are a

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welcome part of this federal budget and could provide a pool of needed nurse teachers, scholars and clinicians for tomorrow. Unfortunately, the graduate training dollars seem to emphasize business and fail to target the nurse scholars needed so desperately for the health of Canadians. Even though both health and education generate economic benefits and education is a primary determinant of health, such investments must be strategic right now. This is an unprecedented global issue.”

Whilst the Canadian government is forecasting two years of large deficits, it has also said the budget will include a plan to return the country's finances to the black within five years.

We must do what it takes to keep our economy moving, and to protect Canadians in this extraordinary time, suggested Flaherty in his budget speech.

According to economists, unless we resolve our nation’s current financial problems, we won’t be seeing our economy rising anytime soon. That being said, our only way out of this economic slowdown: Government must spend money in order to stimulate the economy. Spend heavily, spend smartly, and spend now.

Many would like to see the government make a decision in supporting research and development initiatives where the nation's interest will be served best. If support for infrastructure is also deemed important to the greater good of all, let it be measured, and those involved will be accountable during the process of spending our future dollars.

President, Wendy Fucile, for the Registered Nurses Association of Ontario stressed the need to reach out to those who study and teach on campuses across the country. “Construction jobs are important, but we also must invest in nursing education to avert an even worse nursing shortage.”

“It is true that the budget does include increases for graduate scholarships,” admits Dr. Lynnette Leeseberg Stampler, President of the Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing. “This is helpful to expand capacity within the nursing professoriate, thus increasing the capacity to produce additional nurses. As well the money for increased broadband to underserved areas and further movement to an electronic health record are initiatives that have the potential to increase health care access and support patient safety, both important goals. However, there is little in this budget that directly contributes to health care or the education of the professionals who deliver it.”

Big solutions demand big money, but can this government spend their way out of this economic disaster? Does stimulus spending always work? Will this budget plan be advantageous to Canadians, or will it only sink us deeper into bigger debt and a longer recession? No one can say with certainty if in the end, the budget plan will bring our economy back up to speed.

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“The federal budget may have been born out of political necessity but the real test of the government’s commitment is how quickly the money promised today becomes a reality tomorrow,” says Doris Grinspun, Executive Director for the Registered Nurses Association of Ontario.

As the Conservative party begins its fourth year in government, and Stephen Harper’s fourth year as Prime Minister, they can look forward to a future that is significantly more challenging than anything they have experienced before. We are in an extraordinary situation and need to employ extraordinary measures. We need to be not just providing money for shovels but also for research including furthering the development of nursing science. Nurses impact patient mortality and morbidity – they save lives. The fine print of the federal budget plan is key, because we will be running the largest deficit in Canadian history. The Canadian government will be judged on its ability to deliver on its promises.

“You can fool all the people some of the time, and some of the people all the time, but you cannot fool all the people all the time.” – Abraham Lincoln

ABOUT CASN

The Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing is the national voice for nursing education, research, and scholarship and represents baccalaureate and graduate nursing programs across Canada. CASN’s objectives are *to lead nursing education and nursing scholarship in the interest of healthier Canadians.*

For further information or to schedule an interview with Dr. Ellen Rukholm or Dr. Lynnette Leeseberg Stamler please contact Michelle Viau, Media Officer, 613-235-3150 ext. 21, mviau@casn.ca