

## Media Release

For immediate release

### **Great Canadian Healthcare Debate Result: Health Leaders Make Universality of Mental Health their Top Priority**

ST. JOHN'S (June 5, 2018) – The Great Canadian Healthcare Debate – a marquee feature of the National Health Leadership Conference revealed that universal mental health care must be a top priority. Leaders attending the annual conference have signaled that universal access to a full continuum of mental health services and supports for all people in Canada.

Designed to identify the health care system's most pressing need, this year's Debate this year delved deeper into the top motions of the previous three iterations: mental health, Indigenous health and seniors' health. Emerging as this year's top priority, with the support of 59% of health leaders, was the resolution debated by Nicholas Watters, Director of the Knowledge Exchange Centre at the Mental Health Commission of Canada. In his remarks, Watters urged leaders to identify mechanisms to close funding gap for mental health in both health and social policy budgets. "The lifetime prevalence of depression in Canada is 11.3%. That is comparable with diabetes and hypertension. Yet close to 50% of people living with depression don't access health services for their illness," he said. "Why do we still accept that at least a third of Canadians living with a mental health illness or problem must try to solve these challenges on their own – without the benefit of a publicly-funded mental health care system?," he argued.

While the Mental Health resolution was the clear audience choice, participants at the conference were treated to 90 minutes of provocative dialogue.

The first runner up, with 26% of the vote following the debate, was a resolution debated by Jan Byrd, Patient Safety Improvement Lead for the Canadian Patient Safety Institute. Byrd argued for social and political change that would address the patient safety incidents experienced by Indigenous (First Nations, Metis, and Inuit) persons. Byrd's presentation was a call to action for Canadian healthcare leaders and Indigenous communities to co-develop a meaningful consultation process to strengthen health literacy and patient engagement as critical conditions for patient safety. The second runner up (15% of the vote) was a resolution debated by Dr. Anwar Haq, Executive Director of Covenant Network of Excellence in Seniors' Health and Wellness, which pressed healthcare leaders to commit to changing the culture in the healthcare system by actively involve family caregivers in care settings.

The National Healthcare Leadership Conference is an annual joint event between the Canadian College of Health Leaders and HealthCareCAN. Its leaders were pleased with the end result.



“The spirited and substantive debate that health leaders engaged in was the kind that legislators should be having in legislature across Canada and in the House of Commons” said Paul-Émile Cloutier, President and CEO of HealthCareCAN, the national voice of healthcare organizations and hospitals. “All three motions were extremely well developed and intertwined with each other remarkably well so that whatever progress is made on one issue impacts the others.”

“The debate provides health leaders with a platform to drive system-wide changes and improvements to healthcare services,” said Sue Owen, Interim President and CEO of the Canadian College of Health Leaders. “The debate was true to this year’s theme – Creating the winning conditions for change – and galvanized health leaders across Canada to rally around issues that profoundly affect Canadians and have a significant potential for change.”

*NHLC is the largest national gathering of health system decision-makers in Canada, including representatives from health regions, authorities and alliances; hospitals; long-term care organizations; public health agencies; community care; mental health and social services; government, education and research organizations; professional associations; and consulting firms and industry. More than 700 health leaders attended this year’s event. For more information, visit [www.nhlc-cnls.ca](http://www.nhlc-cnls.ca).*

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