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## PHABC Position on Changes to Health Care Coverage for Refugees

### Background

The federal government has recently proposed extensive changes to the Interim Federal Health (IFH) program, including substantial cuts to important health care services for refugees. These changes are to take place as of June 30, 2012. The cuts include reduction of ‘basic’ coverage, including primary and preventive care, and ‘supplemental’ coverage similar to that available to many low-income Canadians [See chart below from the Citizen and Immigration Canada website].

### PHABC Position

The proposed changes to the Interim Federal Health Program (IFH) will deny refugees access to primary and preventive care. This is contrary to the preventive approach to health care advocated by PHABC. The Association believes that this will only complicate the settlement process for refugees, exacerbating barriers for this vulnerable population to meaningfully participate in society. It also creates a greater health burden for refugees, increasing inequities in access to health care and good health outcomes for an already disadvantaged group. This is socially unjust and contradicts the principles of the Canada Health Act.

The changes are also extremely shortsighted. They will result in downloading care for people in greatest need to emergency departments and urgent care settings. By denying refugees access to primary and preventive care, the Federal government will likely create costly and unnecessary health care expenditures further in the settlement process, and may cause substantial public health threats such as tuberculosis outbreaks. To deny health care to those in greatest need is to inappropriately burden our health care system and the population’s overall health.

The impact on the health of the refugee population, in particular pregnant women, children, and those with chronic diseases, is of greatest concern. Refugees to Canada are in particular need of protection and health services as they have often fled situations that have involved trauma and significant health impacts. Canada should provide care that facilitates health and well-being throughout the settlement process. PHABC, in agreement with many other professional organizations, calls on the Federal government to immediately rescind these proposed changes.

The Interim Federal Health Program should provide basic benefits similar to provincial/territorial health care plans and supplemental benefits similar to what provinces and territories provide under social welfare programs. The current Program does this, and should be sustained.

People affected	Benefits under current system	Benefits under new system
Protected Persons <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resettled refugees</li> <li>• Refugees whose</li> </ul>	Basic Benefits  Basic health-care services (similar to what provincial	<b>Health-Care Coverage</b>  <b>Only if of an urgent or essential</b>

People affected	Benefits under current system	Benefits under new system
<p>claims have been accepted</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People who have received a positive <a href="#">Pre-Removal Risk Assessment</a></li> </ul> <p>(The above people are covered until they qualify for provincial or territorial health insurance.)</p>	<p>or territorial plans cover), and</p> <p>Supplemental Benefits</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pharmacy care</li> <li>• Dental care</li> <li>• Vision care</li> <li>• Ambulance services</li> <li>• Devices to assist with mobility</li> </ul> <p>(Similar to provincial or territorial social assistance plans)</p>	<p><b>nature:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hospital services</li> <li>• Services of doctors and nurses</li> <li>• Laboratory, diagnostic and ambulance services</li> </ul> <p>and</p> <p>Medications and vaccines <b>only if needed to prevent or treat a disease that is a risk to public health or a condition of public safety concern.</b></p>
<p>Refugee Claimants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• while their claim is still pending and</li> <li>• who are <b>not</b> from a <a href="#">Designated Country of Origin</a></li> </ul>	<p>Basic Benefits</p> <p>Basic health-care services (similar to what provincial or territorial plans cover)</p> <p>and</p> <p>Supplemental Benefits</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pharmacy care</li> <li>• Dental care</li> <li>• Vision care</li> <li>• Ambulance services</li> <li>• Devices to assist with mobility</li> </ul> <p>(Similar to provincial or territorial social assistance plans)</p> <p>and</p> <p>An immigration medical examination</p>	<p><b>Health-Care Coverage</b></p> <p><b>Only if of an urgent or essential nature:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hospital services</li> <li>• Services of doctors and nurses</li> <li>• Laboratory, diagnostic and ambulance services</li> </ul> <p>and</p> <p>Medications and vaccines <b>only if needed to prevent or treat a disease that is a risk to public health or a condition of safety concern</b></p> <p>and</p> <p>An immigration medical examination</p>