

The CMA: Roles and Opportunities as a Community of Healers

As members of the board of the CMA, you are the voice of our profession in Canada. Despite a storied legacy, you are now asked to lead your colleagues into new and uncertain territory. The medical profession faces unprecedented challenges and opportunities. The pandemic has helped all Canadians to recognise the strengths and weaknesses of our health care system, and the urgent need to address its deficiencies and build on its successes.

Equally, the absence of the essential elements of a global health care system highlights the inequitable access to appropriate care for billions in need. Looming over us is the climate crisis whose impact on health of all, our health care system and those who work in it is becoming devastatingly real. Ongoing violent conflict complicates efforts to address humanity's real and pressing needs.

Critical to solving the challenges to our collective health is a unified medical profession that is trustworthy and relevant. CMA has a central role in this endeavour. Its history and that of Canada are intertwined. CMA has the capacity and, indeed the responsibility, to do more than its fair share to help resolve these challenges at home and abroad. Impact 2040 cogently outlines priorities and describes some of the necessary underlying principles and requirements.

Key among the requirements for *effective action* is an engaged and informed physician community acting in a coherent and coordinated fashion.

Physicians in Canada are involved in education, research, advocacy and action on a wide front that sweeps from the promotion of universal and equitable health care to the prevention of nuclear war and climate disaster. Working in non-governmental organizations, physicians are an increasingly important element of civil society. Physicians are also an essential voice of medicine and its evolution. In a world that is becoming increasingly fractured, where different versions of the truth are held – sometimes violently – and trust is hard to find, it is ever more important that our profession is a coherent, principled and accurate voice. This becomes even more important as the divisions that have led to the current impasses will need to be bridged. The pursuit of *health for all* is an agenda that could – indeed must – unite humanity in solving some of its seemingly intractable problems.

To succeed in implementing Impact 2040, the CMA needs to focus on physicians, policy makers and the public. As a member-driven doctor's organization, great attention must continue to be given to the engagement of and the well-being of all physicians. We hear too often of burn-out and disillusion among our colleagues. This needs to be addressed in tandem with our efforts to address the exigencies that threaten the health of ourselves, our patients, and our planet.

To this end, we suggest that CMA consider adding or bolstering the following initiatives:

- Create a forum where all Canadian physician led organizations can more effectively coordinate and collaborate on the wide agenda that the CMA will consider as it pursues Impact 2040.

- Develop an education and advocacy program intended to engage all practicing physicians as the agenda of Impact 2040 evolves.
- Collaborate to develop and deliver an education and advocacy program to all Canadian medical students which will assist in helping them to understand and become engaged in the realities that they will face.
- Collaborate to develop and help deliver an outreach program to those contemplating a career in medicine, with a focus on assisting and encouraging those who have been, traditionally, poorly represented in our profession.
- Develop a bespoke healthy public policy consortium to advise, comment and assist in a comprehensive analysis of the impact of public policy on the health of Canadians.

Facilitating networks, fostering consultation, developing education programs, coordinating advocacy efforts, contributing to health policy development and concrete action towards equity, diversity and inclusion will be among the outcomes that assist the CMA in achieving goals relevant in Canada and beyond. Our watchword must be unity; unity in diversity where the manifold voices on a wide variety of issues are heard and valued – sharing the agenda and utilising the leverage that is only possible when disparate voices are heard, acknowledged and encouraged. CMA has always worked very well as the catalyst for incremental change with physician organisations and with government.

Many now believe that, because of the magnitude of the disarray, burnout, despair and system failure that in addition to this work with health care organisations, the power of individual physicians' voices must also be felt across our land. Recent history – from the 1990s on – well demonstrates the power that physicians wield when acting together on behalf of our patients and for the well-being of all. The combination of a coalition of health organisations and the 93,000 Canadian physicians working for Canadians, humanity and the planet will be a crucible of trust, hope and expertise that will be indispensable in the development and implementation of much needed solutions.

Our profession has a rich history of initiative, innovation, and altruism. The CMA can help leverage this as we take on the myriad of challenges we face.

It is increasingly evident that the global and the local are intertwined. Embracing a world vision is key and is intuitive to most physicians. While we grapple with the highly significant issues that beset the Canadian health care system and the physicians who labour at the various coalfaces that produce the burn out, diminution in job satisfaction, and mental health issues, we must confront the global threats that compound our difficulties. We must build on the empathy, compassion and caring that is the bedrock of our profession if we are to fulfill our role as healers.

Regrettably, an increasing number of physicians question the relevance of the CMA and have disengaged from its many initiatives whose very success relies on the enthusiastic support of doctors. Indeed, the fulsome, generous and committed engagement of all physicians is essential if Impact 2040 is to be realized. Collaboration between, and engagement with, all of the voices of the medical profession

will guide us to inclusivity, equity and respect for one another. This collaboration brings relevance and effectiveness.

The Canadian Medical Association is the only organization that speaks for all Canadian physicians. But it cannot do so by fiat. It can only do so by ongoing engagement of the myriad perspectives reflected in the individuals and the organizations that make up the rich tapestry of physicians working on the various issues that are important to them — and to which they devote much of their precious time — often at the sad expense of their families. CMA will be well-served by collaborating with those so devoted to a better world. We have the responsibility to articulate what is best for the health and well-being of all our citizens including physicians and, by extension, what is best for the health of humanity.

Never has it been more important that the medical profession has a clear, cogent and coherent voice to help educate ourselves, the public, the policy makers, the academy and those managing our health care system on the changes required to ensure that everyone enjoys the best possible health.

Doctors have a unique role in society, and our proud history is replete with advances where we have shouldered our responsibilities, risked bold initiatives and taken stands that accomplished positive change. Such an opportunity is now staring us in the face.

If not us, then whom?

If not now, then when?

We have shared some concrete suggestions for the board of CMA to consider. An in-depth conversation would be useful to elaborate and consult on them. To this end, we would request a meeting with our colleague leaders to explore their merit and to determine the ways forward—together.