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**\*\*For Immediate Release\*\***

From the National Coordinating Group on Women and Health  
Reform and the Canadian Women's Health Network:

## **The Romanow Report: What Does it Mean for Women?**

We applaud Romanow for demonstrating the sustainability of Medicare. A publicly funded system delivered through non-profit services is crucial for all women in Canada. But like other reports on health care reform in the last decade, this report fails to recognize the significant ways in which health care is an issue for women. Women are 80% of paid health care providers, a similar proportion of those providing unpaid personal care and a majority of those receiving care, especially among the elderly.

The sustainability of the system is not just about finances -- it's about women's work. As paid workers women provide medical, nursing and diagnostic care as well as cleaning, cooking and laundry services that are essential determinants of health in the delivery of care. By drawing a distinction between "direct" and "ancillary" health care services, Romanow ignores the skilled nature of women's paid work and their contributions to care. Moreover, he fails to make recommendations to address the deteriorating conditions women face in providing care.

Women also sustain the system as unpaid health care providers. Romanow's report fails to adequately address the full range of home care women provide, especially long-term and chronic care. While he reports "that caregiving is becoming an increasing burden on many in our society, especially women," his recommendation for caregiver leave through the Employment Insurance Program will not benefit the many women who do not have forms of paid work that would make them eligible for such leave.

Romanow recognizes gender as a determinant of health. He also offers valuable recommendations for primary health care reform that could benefit women, but only if attention is paid to women's particular needs. Finally, although women constitute up to 3/4 of those in long-term care facilities, the report is virtually silent on these services.

Sustaining an efficient, affordable and effective health care system must mean sustaining women in providing and receiving care. Like Romanow, we agree that "we need more than rhetoric; we need action". *We need to make the health care system work for women.*

For interviews, contact:

**Dr. Pat Armstrong, Chair**

National Coordinating Group on Health Care Reform and Women,  
The Centres of Excellence for Women's Health Program

Phone: (647) 292-2216

Email: [patarmst@yorku.ca](mailto:patarmst@yorku.ca)

Website: <http://www.cewh-cesf.ca/en/index.html>

Or:

**Kathleen O’Grady**, Director of Communications

Canadian Women’s Health Network

Email: [news@cwhn.ca](mailto:news@cwhn.ca)

Phone: (514) 886-2526; Fax: (204) 989-2355

Website: <http://www.cwhn.ca>