

## Universal health care a major concern

Universal, public health care, the cornerstone of Canada's social programs, is considered by Canadians to be a defining national policy.

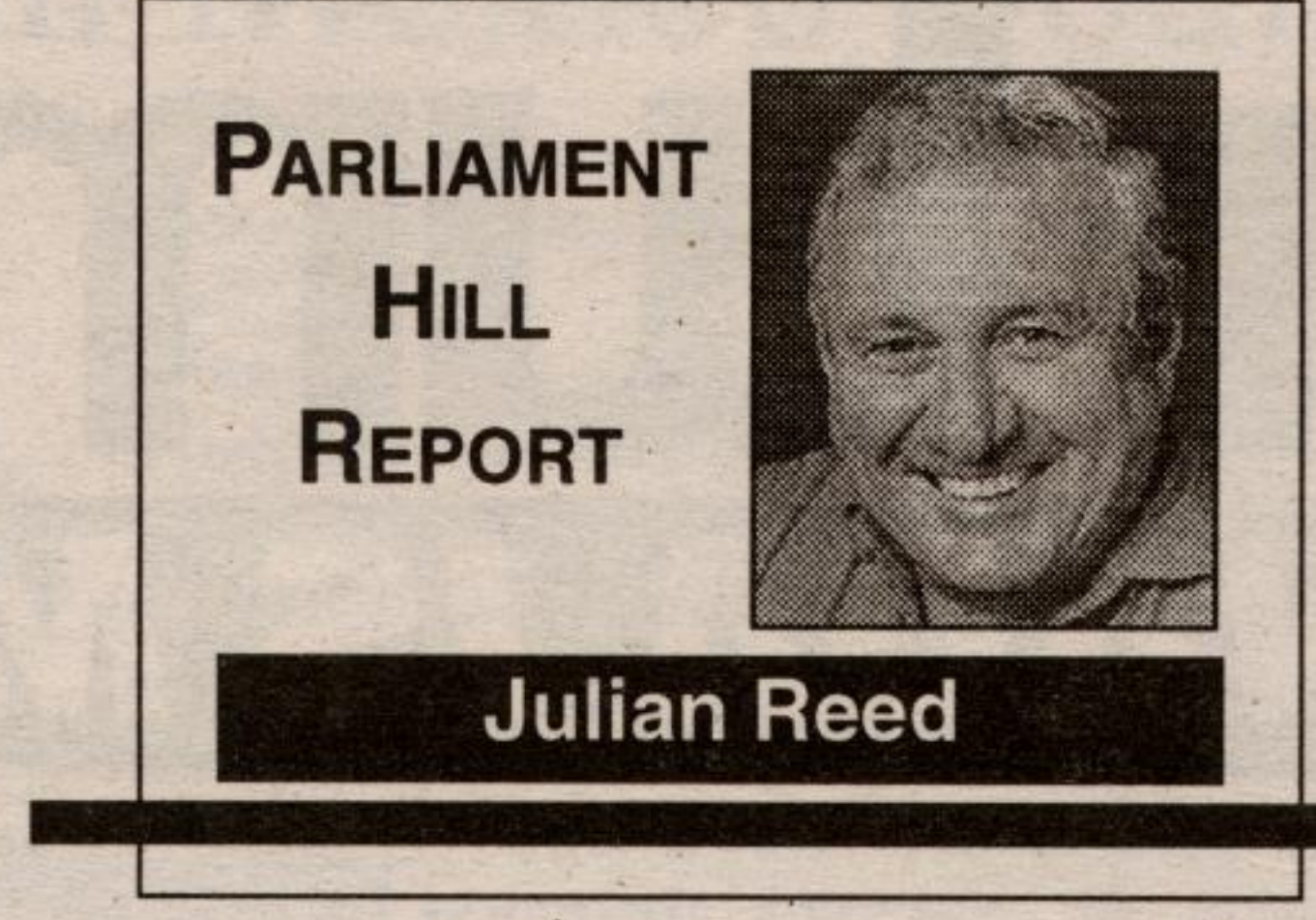
The Nation Forum on Health concluded in its February 1997 final report that Canadians' biggest concerns about health care are maintaining equitable, universal access and ensuring the high quality of services. Our government is working to do both; to preserve and strengthen public health care, while making the system more efficient and responsive to the needs of Canadians.

The Liberal government is determined to support the principles of the Canada Health Act. There will be no two-tiered medicine in Canada. Medical care should be available to all Canadians, not just those who can afford to pay.

The government has provided the provinces with stable, predictable funding for health care through the Canada Health and Social Transfer (CHST). Cash transfers to the provinces under the CHST will stay about \$11 billion annually. A five-year schedule will stabilize the CHST at 1998-99 funding levels for two years, and then begin to increase it in 2000-01.

While the government must cut federal departmental spending by 14 per cent between 1993-94 and 1998-99, total federal transfers to Ontario including the CHST will decrease by only 11.4 per cent representing at most 2.5 per cent of Ontario's revenues. Even though cash transfers to Ontario under the CHST will decrease between 1997-98 and 1998-99, the CHST tax point transfer will increase over the same period, and more than offset the decline.

The Liberal government provides the provinces with stability and even growth in transfers for health care services beginning in 1998-99. By comparison the Ontario government's proposed personal income tax



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cut would reduce revenues by \$4.9 billion annually by 1999, four times the decrease in federal transfers.

The forum recommended that the health care system use its resources and funding more wisely, for more efficient services and a higher level of care. The 1997 budget responds to this recommendation with several initiatives to improve health care.

The 1997 budget sets aside \$300 million for targeted health care initiatives, including \$100 million for the Community Action Program for Children and the Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program, two successful early-intervention programs. The \$150 million Health Transition Fund will develop pilot projects that develop new methods of health care delivery; and another \$50 million will be invested in a country-wide Health Information System, which will ensure access to information on the most effective treatments and approaches.

These initiatives will help improve the health of Canadians, and guide improvements to the health care system, while the CHST will continue to provide the provinces with stable financial support. With more effective use of resources the Canadian public health care system can be, not simply preserved, but strengthened.

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