

*The Address*

Health also calls for prevention. As we all know, an ounce of prevention is better than a pound of cure, however good the care system is. This is to say that in terms of prevention, any budget cut that is not immediately compensated by an equivalent increase in the efficiency of the programs affected would translate into a cost increase higher than the expected savings.

The best prevention with regard to health is to enhance the socio-economic condition of the people of Quebec and Canada. A large segment of the population could be negatively affected by the precarious state of the economy in Quebec and everywhere in Canada.

From Saint John's to Victoria, women and men, young and old, live in socio-economic conditions that do not allow them to develop their full potential. We all have in our ridings families living under the poverty line and barely surviving.

Pregnant women are not eating appropriately, preventing the foetus from developing normally. Several newborns are underweight and require prolonged hospital care. Others are born with diseases due to deficiencies in their mothers' diet and require treatment during several years. The prenatal nutrition programs announced in the throne speech will have to provide a real solution to this important problem.

School children are even reported to be starving because the fridge is almost empty at the end of the month. These children often do badly in school and drop out before getting a diploma. We must do something for these children.

People who cannot find decent housing are even worse off. As it was pointed out in the health and welfare policy issued in 1992 by the Quebec government, living in a run-down apartment with poor heat and poor ventilation is particularly harmful to the health of young children and seniors.

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Therefore, the social housing problem is extremely serious in every province, including Quebec. This situation cannot go on forever.

One of the best ways to reduce health costs is to enable everybody to live in adequate and decent conditions. And it is by providing decent jobs that we will be able to improve the situation.

Also, even though we agree with the efforts of the Department of Health to reduce tobacco consumption, we deeply regret the program implemented by the previous government to increase taxes on tobacco. This program, which is a disaster, has generated four major adverse effects.

First, the creation of a contraband network and a black market which have generated uncontrollable and unnecessary illegal and criminal activities. Second, tobacco sales have dropped everywhere, resulting in a sharp drop in profits for businesses. Consequently, tax revenues have also been reduced drastically. Finally, and this is both unfortunate and ironic, the emergence of this black market has not only prevented the expected reduction in tobacco consumption, but has in fact provoked an increase in consumption among young people, if only because of the appeal of cigarettes as a contraband product.

It is a real shame that this House is responsible for having provoked such a serious and unnecessary crisis when there are so many real problems to tackle. Therefore, we ask the new government to reduce drastically taxes on tobacco products.

The throne speech states in less than two lines that a Centre for Excellence for women's health will be established to ensure that women's health issues will receive the attention they deserve. This project is certainly commendable, but will it be a true program for support, research and action for women's health or will it be merely a documentation centre as the Liberal government program seemed to suggest?

What funds will be targeted to research on women's health? There are deficiencies in the research on breast cancer, gynaecology and obstetrics, chronic and degenerative diseases, mental health, violence and occupational illnesses. If it is the socio-economic situation of women which determines their health needs, what concrete measures are needed to eliminate these unfortunate conditions? It is urgent to act and to go to the roots of the problem. Women are poor and that is the reason for a lot of their health problems.

Everybody has a brother, a sister, or a friend struggling with a drug or alcohol addiction. We urge the government to give special support to organizations which work for the detoxication and rehabilitation of those who are affected by such problems.

The throne speech mentions a national forum on health to foster a dialogue on the renewal of Canada's health system. We can only praise the government for this initiative but, at the same time, we are concerned that this type of exercise might take too long to get under way, might cost too much and might end with a report which will be shelved. The Bloc Québécois will strongly criticize any attitude which would lead such an initiative to flop.

The Bloc will also ensure that the government does not use this forum to justify unilateral changes in transfer payments which would be to the detriment of Quebec's and the other provinces' interests. Indeed, the Bloc Québécois' mandate is to