

A member's open call to the Canadian Physiotherapy Association: Review the way our association approaches health equity

October 2, 2017

Dear Canadian Physiotherapist Colleagues,

My motivation to write this letter flows directly from the release of "*Call to Action: Canadian Physiotherapy Association Position on Tax Reform.*"

As a physiotherapist working in global health, I follow politics: these have real and meaningful impacts on my professional practice. Accordingly, I have been following the Government of Canada's proposal for tax reform; listening to voices that are in agreement with the changes, as well as those that are against them.

Of these, the perspective that resonated most strongly with me came from a group of medical doctors I admire. **These MDs were willing to speak in *opposition to the loudest voices of their profession and present an alternative vision*** – not only to the "*Trudeau is attacking doctors*" narrative, but also to the basic framing of the discussion.

<https://docsandtaxes.wordpress.com/>

After seeing such a well-grounded, forward-looking perspective in the news cycle, I wondered if our association would contact members to develop a position with respect to the implications of these changes for physiotherapy in Canada. A few days later I found out; not because the CPA asked our opinion, but instead because *it was calling Canadian physiotherapists to oppose tax reform.*

Through most of my lifetime, I have been surrounded by talk about how our public institutions are in crisis due to a lack of funding. During this same lifetime, I cannot ever remember a government that was elected without *promising tax cuts for at least one segment of the population.* More typically, winning governments are those that promise tax cuts for everyone. **I am very confident that the co-existence of these two phenomena – poor funding and low taxes – is not a coincidence.**

If we look at CPA's posted position statements, a collection of them are related to better public funding. The CPA proposes additional funding for physiotherapy to be part of [the response to the opioid crisis](#) and [primary healthcare](#); it also [expresses concerns](#) about a lack of public funding leading to a loss of physiotherapy service. **I support all of these CPA positions: they are aligned with principles of *health equity*, a central concern of those of us who work in global health.**

By contrast, the "*Call to Action: CPA Position on Tax Reform,*" is at very least inconsiderate of equity.

In Canada, in 2017, we generally agree that public services are good. And we also generally agree that *we pay* too much tax. Most of us think that *the wealthy* should contribute more – the only catch is that when we are talking about taxes, we have great difficulty identifying who the wealthy are.

The opponents of tax reform – including the *CPA Call to Action* – talk about how the loss of three tax breaks for incorporated professionals will attack the middle class and “crush small business.” Meanwhile, in the specific descriptions of the effects of the changes, *the webinar linked by CPA describes the case of an incorporated professional who earned \$400,000, after expenses, in a single year. This is 8.9 times what I earn and not consistent to what I understand to be the middle class or a small business owner.*

If we, as a profession, truly believe in reasonably-funded public services, did we consider the juxtaposition of that belief to a *Call to Action* to protect tax breaks? I propose we did not.

I understand why some of my colleagues are upset by the proposed tax reform. I also understand why the CPA thought it reasonable to bypass member consultation and release a public *Call to Action* in the final days of the Government’s specified timeline for feedback.

It is precisely here, *at these taken-for-granted understandings*, that I wish to draw your attention: why is it that we accept that our association would not interrogate the wider impacts of advancing the interests of a sub-group of our physiotherapist colleagues? Why is it that we would not even check to see if there are alternative perspectives? Why does our profession not have the infrastructure of a network or group that ensures that population-level concerns stay on our discussion tables? I propose that the answer to these questions is because **we, as Canadian physiotherapists, have not made a collective commitment to health equity.**

In the final hours of the Government’s consultation phase, like the CPA, I too encourage you to contact the [Finance Minister](#). In contrast to the CPA’s *Call to Action*, I encourage you to think about the potential implications for *health equity* if we end the income tax breaks currently enjoyed by incorporated professionals like those described in the webinar examples.

That said, today’s tax reform proposal is merely one small chapter in a larger book about the type of society we desire, and the way that the economy and our profession contribute to that society. More important than my opinion on #TaxFairness is my belief in the merits of health equity. For this reason, **I am publicly calling on the CPA to begin the process of reviewing how we, as an association that is stronger together, incorporate health equity into our positions, our processes, and our activities.**

In solidarity,
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