

# Health Issues Report

by Shirley Straughton

## The cost of health care

Newspapers are filled with dire predictions of cuts to our medicare system. We hear of other provinces making drastic cuts to their health care budgets. Prior to his departure, M. Côté suggested that individuals with chronic illnesses pay for their own medications and a public outcry ensued.

The question of who should pay or how cuts should be made have given rise to much speculation. User fees, decreasing medical staff, evaluation of doctor's billings, etc. have all been discussed widely in the media.

As taxpayers and concerned citizens, we must take care that our health care system not deteriorate into a two-tiered system — one for the rich and one for the poor. We must insist on accessible and affordable medical care for all.

Before any cuts are established, there must be a careful evaluation of our present system. Financial restructuring need not always be harmful. In fact, there are certain areas in which it could be beneficial — disease prevention, decreasing hospitalization time for some patients, increasing the availability of home care and so on.

In April 1993, the Department

of Canadian Health and Welfare issued a "discussion paper" entitled "A Vision of Health for Children and Youth in Canada". The main focus of this document, and a more co-ordinated and cost-effective network of services. Presently only 2% of health care expenses are directed to programs dealing with these issues.

One of the goals of this proposal is to "promote healthy behaviors and reduce the incidence of preventable death, disability, injury, and illness". Parents can take an active role in helping to decrease accidental injuries as well as becoming good role models for their children by doing two very simple things.

### 1 - Buy a bicycle helmet for your child

Head injuries are one of the leading causes of death and disability in the pediatric and adolescent population. Statistics from The Montreal Children's Hospital show that 38.8% of children with moderate to severe head injuries from December 1989 to December 1992 resulted from bicycle accidents in which helmets were not worn.

A minor head injury, also known as a concussion, consists of a trauma to the head resulting in a

temporary alteration in brain function. Many children with a minor head injury are admitted to hospitals for a 24 hour observation period. Even with this short admission, the emotional strain and disruption of the family is evident.

There are also extremely high financial costs as well. Each child



that is admitted to The Montreal Children's Hospital with a minor head injury is billed almost \$1,200.00. From January 1993 to January 1994, the number of minor head injuries admitted to The Montreal Children's Hospital was 333 — a cost of almost \$4,000,000.00. At the same time, there were 26 children with moderate to severe head injuries

admitted. The amount for just one of these children is \$61,000.00 and climbing as rehabilitation and special care will always be needed.

Obviously not all head injuries can be prevented but the use of bicycle helmets will decrease the number of children injured each year. A helmet will absorb the force of impact, distributing it over the surface and padding instead of the head. Wearing a bicycle helmet can reduce your child's risk of serious head injury by 85%.

Cost can be a deterrent but safe and affordable helmets are becoming more widely available. Home and School Associations can help by asking community organizations to sponsor or offer discounts to their students. Parents can be very effective by wearing helmets themselves and insisting that their children follow suit.

### 2 - Learn CPR

Would you know what to do if your child choked on a piece of food or drowned in a neighbor's pool?

Would you be able to help your friend who was having a heart attack?

Did you know that whenever CPR is performed in real life threatening cases, 91% of the time, the rescuer knows the victim

and 64% of the time it is a family member?

What are the requirements for your day care personnel, lunch time supervisors, babysitters, etc.? Do they know what to do in an emergency and can they do it safely? Are our schools and school boards offering CPR courses to their staff? Could your Home and School Association organize CPR courses for your parents, students and teachers?

Did you know that an investment of 4 to 6 hours could prevent the helpless feeling of not being able to come to the assistance of someone you care about? That is all the time needed to take a CPR course. Certified instructors are available in almost every community throughout Quebec. Contact your local hospital, CLSC, fire department, or the Canadian Heart Foundation for someone near you. Many are willing to teach a small group in your home, school, or community center. Ensure the safety of your family by taking a CPR course as soon as possible!

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