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Governments Showing Promise on Wait Times, According to WTA's Interim Report Card

Ottawa, November 29, 2006 – The Wait Time Alliance (WTA) released an interim report card today showing governments are making some progress on achieving wait time benchmarks and implementing wait-time commitments made in the 2004 First Ministers' *10-Year Plan to Strengthen Health Care*.

“Today, I think it’s fair to say that government efforts on wait times are showing promise,” said WTA co-chair Dr. Lorne Bellan. “However, like in most school classes, there are some high achievers and some who could really stand to apply themselves more.”

The WTA has graded governments on the implementation of the 10-Year Plan to Strengthen Health Care, as well as the achieving of wait time benchmarks. Benchmarks in turn, were assessed against both those established by governments in December 2005 and those set by the WTA in August 2005.

In terms of making progress on implementation of the 2004 health plan:

- Governments get an A and B for funding and establishing benchmarks;
- Governments slip to a C and D for providing information and developing targets; and,
- Governments get an “incomplete” for establishing access indicators and meaningful reductions in wait times.

Turning to progress in achieving benchmarks for medically acceptable wait times in the five priority areas:

- Governments get an A for both Cancer Care and Cardiac Care. Those grades slip to a B and C respectively when compared to the WTA benchmarks;
- Governments get a C for Joint Replacement and Sight Restoration both in comparison to their own and the WTA benchmarks;
- Governments get an “incomplete” for Diagnostic Imaging since they have not established a benchmark and they get an “F” when compared to the WTA benchmarks.

The interim report card represents Canadians' first opportunity to have an objective examination of what has been accomplished in terms of cutting wait times in the five clinical areas designated "high priority" by the 2004 Ten-Year Plan to Strengthen Health Care: diagnostic imaging; joint replacement; cancer care; sight restoration; and cardiac care.

"The benchmarks approved by governments as part of the 10-year Health Care Plan were not as stringent as those developed by the Wait Time Alliance through medical consensus, but they were a good start," said Normand Laberge, WTA co-chair. "When government performance is compared to the WTA benchmarks, the grading results are lower."

While the grades are middling, it is the lack of public information available on wait times progress that has the WTA most worried.

"Sporadically updated or incomplete information and reporting greatly undermines the public's confidence in their political leaders to sustain positive action on wait times," warned Dr. Colin McMillan, President of the CMA. "Now we need to bring together the patchwork quilt of regional successes into one galvanized pan-Canadian wait time strategy."

In its final report —*It's About Time: Achieving Benchmarks and Best Practices in Wait Time Management*, the WTA recommended:

- A final set of wait-time benchmarks in all five areas including all new benchmarks for cardiovascular care and changes to those for nuclear medicine
- A toolbox of strategies for governments to consider in implementing wait-time reduction initiatives
- A Canada Health Access Fund to ensure patients can access care if services are not available within the acceptable wait-time benchmark.

The WTA final report also includes two key recommendations: A new 5-year, \$1-billion federal Health Human Resources Reinvestment Fund and a 5-year \$2-billion fund to improve portability of care so patients can get the care they need when they need it.

The Wait Time Alliance of Canada (WTA) is comprised of the Canadian Medical Association, the Canadian Association of Radiologists, the Canadian Association of Nuclear Medicine, the Canadian Association of Radiation Oncology, the Canadian Cardiovascular Society, the Canadian Ophthalmological Society, and the Canadian Orthopaedic Association.

Media can access the Interim Report Card and background materials at www.waittimealliance.ca

For more information:

Carole Lavigne, Media Relations

Tel: (613) 731-8610 or 1-800-663-7336 ext. 1266