Opening Statement

House of Commons
Standing Committee on Finance

Pre-Budget Consultations 2017-2018

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Check against delivery
Ladies and gentlemen, thank you.

The CMA’s 2018 pre-budget brief has been provided to you so I will not use our time rehashing our recommendations today in detail.

But I want to be clear; acting on the CMA’s key recommendation – that the federal government provide targeted funding to support the development of a pan-Canadian seniors strategy to address the needs of the aging population – is the defining challenge facing our nation today.

Canada’s health care system is confronted with a growing and aging population with more complex and chronic health care needs.

When our public health system was created about 50 years ago, Canada’s population was just over 20 million and the average life expectancy was 71. Today, our population is over 30 million and the average life expectancy is 10 years longer. According to Statistics Canada, for the first time in our nation’s history there are now more people aged 65 and older than there are children under 14.

Relying on acute care hospitals to care for our aging population is an ineffective use of health care dollars, and is not sustainable. The demands on our system will simply become too great, and such an approach will fail both our aging population and the remainder of Canadians who must access the health care system in a timely fashion.

The CMA believes that the federal government should invest in seniors care, guided by a pan-Canadian seniors strategy. Such a strategy will contribute to the renewal of the entire health system and improve the productivity of health care delivery across the country.

We must remember that caregivers are the backbone of any care system. The over five million Canadians who provide care to a senior family member or friend need more support.

By developing a national seniors strategy now, the federal government will help Canadians be as productive as possible in their workplaces and in their communities. Implementing the CMA recommendations as an integrated package is essential to stitching together the elements of community-based and residential care for seniors.

In addition to making a meaningful contribution to meeting the future care needs of Canada’s aging population, these recommendations will mitigate the impacts of economic pressures on individuals and jurisdictions across the country. With strong federal leadership now, we can
evolve our system and right our course. The CMA pre-budget recommendations provide a clear roadmap to do so.

On the subject of righting our course, I must also call attention to the proposed taxation changes announced for consultation on July 18.

I will not belabour the points made in thousands of letters, emails and in the media over the course of the last two months. However, we must understand that these proposals are the most significant changes to the small business tax system.

These changes will have a negative impact on doctors, convenience store operators, electrical contractors and the family farm – in short on the entire small business community, most of whom are squarely in the “middle class” and drive the engine of the Canadian economy.

The CMA believes a 75-day consultation is inadequate to deal with the scope of these changes, the ramifications for our members and over one million other small business operators, and Canada’s prospects for future economic growth.

We acknowledge the diversity of opinions and perspectives on this issue, including the support expressed this week by some physicians. What we can all agree on is that a comprehensive review of our tax system is required and that takes time.

As Parliament resumed this week, our nation turns to its elected representatives for leadership. Respecting and celebrating our health care professionals, be they nurses, doctors, therapists, counsellors or others, is a sign of great leadership. With the serious challenges facing our health care system it is critical that we discuss Budget 2018 and all other public policy matters within the context of Canadian values.