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## **Budget 2012 must include strategies to improve access to health care: CFMS**

OTTAWA, Mar. 19 2012 – On March 29, 2012 the Government of Canada will table its much-anticipated 2012 Budget in the House of Commons. Minister Flaherty has announced that this budget will focus on the federal deficit and long-term investments in the Canadian economy.

Last month, Canadian medical students visited Parliament Hill to call for better access to health care in rural and remote regions of the country. Though 22 percent of Canadians live in such regions, they have access to only 17 percent of family doctors and three percent of specialists. By the end of the decade, the population-to-doctor ratio in rural Canada is expected to grow to over three times the national average. The Canadian Federation of Medical Student (CFMS) believes that all Canadians – regardless of location – deserve adequate, quality health care.

In its 2011 Budget, the Government of Canada began working toward this goal. It announced that it would forgive a portion of Canada Student Loans for new family physicians working in rural and remote communities. The CFMS applauds this initiative, and calls upon the government to further strengthen it by deferring repayment of these loans until the completion of residency training. Rising debt continues to be a challenge for medical trainees and, as interest accrues, they must begin paying off their loans before they are eligible for this incentive.

Student delegates also called upon the federal government to help fund the establishment of mentorship programs that attract rural applicants to

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medical school. These students are 2.5 times more likely to practice in a rural setting, but are severely underrepresented in medical school classrooms. Mentorship programs in the United States and Australia have been highly successful in recruiting rural applicants to medical school, and have demonstrated that such a strategy would be effective in Canada.

Canadian medical students have proposed sensible, evidence-based investments for accessible health care across Canada. The CFMS hopes to find these investments in the government's new economic plan.

*The Canadian Federation of Medical Students (CFMS) is a national organization that represents over 7500 medical students at 14 medical schools across Canada.*

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