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Getting Health Services to Canadians Living on the Margins

Ottawa – A new study by Canadian Policy Research Networks reveals that a surprisingly high number of Canadians live beyond the reaches of mainstream health care and suffer a burden of illness greater than the rest of us.

Approximately one-third of Canadians live on the health care margins – in rural, remote and northern communities for example, where life expectancy is shorter, and death and infant mortality rates are higher than the rest of Canada – but health services are fewer. The study found that two-thirds of residents in Canada’s northern and remote regions live more than 100 kilometres from the nearest doctor. And many rural emergency rooms are “just one retirement away from closing.” The underserved can also live in the urban core: the estimated 100,000 homeless Canadians, recent immigrants, the frail elderly or Aboriginal peoples – populations that may have poor language or social skills or substance abuse or mental health issues that make accessing health care difficult.

At the same time, the study, *Frontline Health Care in Canada: Innovations in Delivering Services to Vulnerable Populations*, also reveals a creative, dedicated corps of health care professionals who are struggling to help these vulnerable Canadians. CPRN interviewed, for the first time, 48 frontline health care providers across the country to learn about their innovative ways of reaching underserved Canadians. For example, a Toronto clinic uses a bus to bring health care to immigrant women working in factories; a Calgary health centre in a low-income neighbourhood operates a laundromat that serves as a safe gathering place for women and a venue for health promotion; and in Labrador, a unique program to train physicians and encourage them to stay in the community has resulted in a remarkable decline in the infant mortality rate.

David Hay, the Director of CPRN’s Family Network, says this groundbreaking study “captures best practises and provides the foundation from which we can begin to improve the delivery of health care to Canadians living on the margins.”

This study is the product of a unique partnership between CPRN and AstraZeneca Canada, one of the world’s leading pharmaceutical companies. AstraZeneca is embarking on a long-term employee-driven corporate citizenship initiative to support the cause of better health for Canada’s geographically and socially marginalized populations.

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