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THE QUEBEC ADVANTAGE AND RX&D'S COMMITMENT TO PUT PATIENTS FIRST

**By Russell Williams,
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A year ago, I wrote about the exciting new frontiers for medicines and vaccines as we continue to develop new therapies that improve health and save lives. I also described how Quebec had an historic opportunity to become a leader in life sciences not only in Canada but around the world by embracing a new and innovative drug policy.

I am pleased to report that the government of Quebec has seized this opportunity by finalizing the new pharmaceutical and innovation strategies and the results will be positive for patients, our health-care system and the economy.

This comprehensive approach to policy making is aimed at building partnerships to prevent disease and improve health outcomes by providing patients with access to the medicines that are best for their individual needs and build a strong economic climate for innovation.

These policies will boost innovation which has been described as "the vital spark of all human change, improvement and progress." That spark has been evident in Quebec for some time as the research-based pharmaceutical community has grown to now employ almost 10,000 men and women and generate more than 50 thousand jobs in the province's economy, the highest in Canada. This year alone, Rx&D member companies have announced over \$500 million in additional investment in Quebec.

In 2006, the members of Rx&D invested nearly \$500 million in research and development in Quebec which helps to build our hospitals and universities into world class centres of excellence. This investment which has increased by almost 590% since the late 80's also provides good jobs for our best and brightest young people.

Partnerships for better health

Quebec's drug policy is one that stresses partnerships in building a sustainable health-care system that puts patients first. When it comes to medicines and our health, therapeutic choice is crucial to maximizing patient outcomes. The cheapest treatment is not always the best for the patient or for the health care system.

This partnership recognizes that we all have a role to play in ensuring our health-care system is sustainable and able to meet the challenges of today and tomorrow.

Ours is an aging population and we will need to work together to prevent disease and treat chronic illness. Currently, two million Canadians suffer from diabetes and that number is expected to increase by 50% by the end of the decade.

Our "Knowledge is the best medicine" program, in place since 1994, is an important partnership for patients that has helped educate more than three million Canadians about wellness and safe and appropriate medication use.

How Medicines have changed our lives

Canada's Research Based Pharmaceutical Companies (Rx&D) represents more than 50 innovative companies with a single overriding mission: to serve the interests of patients by developing medicines and vaccines that help patients live longer, healthier and more fulfilling lives.

Innovative pharmaceuticals have played a vital role in the fight against disease and premature death in Canada. For example, many devastating childhood diseases like smallpox have been virtually eliminated. Average life expectancy for Canadian men and women combined has increased from 60 years of age in 1922 to 80 years of age in 2003, partly due to innovative medicines and vaccines.

A Cost Effective Health Choice

Brand name medicines are also cost effective, representing less than 10 cents of every dollar invested in health care in Canada. These new medicines help reduce costs elsewhere in the health-care system by reducing wait times, hospitalization and surgery. For example, ulcers which once required hospitalization and surgery are now treated with medication, most often on an out-patient basis. Patients who may have been hospitalized with mental illness in past can be treated with medication today which allows them to continue working and living with their families.

Furthermore, over the past 10 years, Canadian patented drug prices have been, on average, 8% below the International median.

Maintaining the highest ethical standards

We can accomplish so much more when we work together. Our member companies are devoted to creating the conditions for ethical partnerships by adhering to a strict *Code of Conduct*. Our *Code* has gained a reputation internationally for setting the highest ethical standards governing relationships between our member companies and health professionals. Our *Code* is based on the principles of transparency, accountability and most of all doing what is best to improve patient outcomes.

Improving health around the world

Disease knows no borders and our efforts to fight it must be global. Our member companies are also doing their share to improve access to affordable medicines in developing countries by supporting Canada's Access to Medicines Regime and other initiatives. Member companies are investing in programs like the Accelerated Access Initiative working with UN agencies and developing countries. The number of Africans receiving HIV/AIDS medications under this initiative has increased by 120% over two years and together we have initiated 17 programs to prevent mother-to-child transmission of HIV/AIDS.

Here at home, research-based pharmaceutical companies have provided more than \$160 million in donated medicines to support the humanitarian work of Montreal-based Health Partners International of Canada in the world's impoverished countries.

A healthier tomorrow

Today's investments create tomorrow's health solutions. Without support for innovation, without access to new medicines, we will not spark the innovation that creates improvement and progress.

The discovery process is time-consuming, risky and expensive. The cost of developing a new medicine or vaccine can be a billion dollars or more and take up to 15 years of research. Only one in 10,000 molecules being investigated will actually make it to the pharmacy shelf as a safe and effective medicine.

Canada's success in life sciences is built on three conditions for success. The first is a strong intellectual property (IP) regime which provides the cornerstone for innovation. Recently, our federal government took a positive step forward in this regard by strengthening data protection regulations to eight years although there still persists instability in the IP regime. Health Canada is attempting to fulfill the second condition by streamlining its regulatory process for the approval of new drugs.

More progress is needed for the third condition - the ability of Canadian patients to have timely access to new discoveries. In several provinces, patients who rely on provincial drug plans have access to only about one in five drug discoveries. Quebec listed on its formulary 42% of the new medicines launched between 2005 and 2007. However, many of these have restrictions to access. We must ensure that patients have access to these life saving medicines.

Eliminating the access gap and putting patients at the centre of health policy decisions is crucial to Canada's overall success.

As a former member of the Quebec National Assembly representing the Montreal riding of Nelligan, I believe that Quebec can continue to build its reputation as a leader in attracting life-sciences investment. I also know that Montreal has all of the ingredients for success: a thriving hub of education and health institutions as well as a strong private sector.

Our vision is to ensure our community is a true partner in our health-care system working with all governments and health stakeholders for the benefit of Quebecers and Canadians.

The challenges are numerous but Quebec has the opportunity to continue to build a world class environment for life sciences. It must continue to develop and implement concrete measures that will position Quebec to be a world leader in research and innovation.

Russell Williams is the President of Canada's Research-Based Pharmaceutical Companies (Rx&D). Prior to his appointment as Rx&D President, Mr. Williams was a member of the Quebec National Assembly for nearly 15 years and served as Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Health and Social Services.