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Address by the Prime Minister announcing compensation for Hepatitis C Victims

Speech

25 July 2006

Cambridge, Ontario

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Thank you everyone for joining us here this morning.

Before I begin, I'd like to take a moment to acknowledge some special guests in attendance today:

Mike McCarthy, former vice president of the Canadian Haemophilia Society;

John Plater, the chair of the Canadian Haemophilia Society's Task Force on Hepatitis C and HIV; and

Joey Hache, a young man who has been a steadfast advocate for equal compensation.

I would like to thank all of these men for their hard work and dedication over the years.

The fact that we are here today is in no small part due to their efforts.

I would also like to commend Tony Clement for his excellent handling of this file since becoming Health Minister.

And thank his Parliamentary Secretary, Steven Fletcher, who has championed equal compensation since his arrival in Ottawa in 2004.

I am also very please to have a number of MPs with here today:

The Member for Cambridge, Gary Goodyear;

The Member for Kitchener-Conestoga, Harold Albrecht; and

The Member for Halton, Garth Turner.

It gives me great pleasure to be with you here today to announce an agreement that brings us one step closer to the end of a disturbing chapter in Canada's recent history.

One which saw thousands of ordinary men and women – through no fault of their own – infected with hepatitis C, a horrible disease for which there is no cure.

Because of the use of tainted blood products, these Canadians have been forced to endure a life of pain and suffering.

Sadly, many of those who were infected are no longer here with us.

Each and every one of those deaths constitutes a Canadian tragedy.

These were men and women with hopes, dreams, aspirations – and families.

Unfortunately, we can't undo what happened in the past.

Nor will anything we say or do today take away the pain and suffering that has been endured.

What we can do, however, is to make sure that everyone who contracted this terrible disease in the past is treated fairly and compassionately.

And that means providing compensation to those men and women who were infected before 1986 and after 1990, and who, consequently, were left out of the previous Government's compensation arrangements.

This was one of the key recommendations of the Krever Commission which studied the tainted blood problem.

Mr. Justice Krever was clear in his report - no distinction should be made between those who contracted the disease between 1986 and 1990 and those who were infected prior to 1986 and after 1990.

His reasoning was simple: all should be compensated equally because all of the victims had endured pain and suffering.

Our Party has long agreed with this conclusion.

And now, as Government, we're acting upon it.

That is why I am pleased to announce today that Canada's New Government has reached an agreement on the fundamental elements of a settlement for all those infected with hepatitis C from the blood system before January 1, 1986 and after July 1, 1990.

Through this agreement, we will fulfill our commitment to provide compensation to all those who contracted hepatitis C as a result of tainted blood, regardless of when they were infected.

The agreement announced today will serve as the foundation for a final settlement with this group of previously ignored victims.

Once a final settlement has been arrived at and approved by the courts, the federal government will set aside nearly \$1 billion in a special settlement fund whose sole purpose will be to provide compensation to the pre-1986 and post-1990 hep-C victims.

The amount of money each individual will receive will be based on a variety of factors relating to the progress of the disease.

Compensation will also be provided to the estates of those victims who, tragically, are no longer with us.

And while this money will certainly not undo the pain and suffering that has been endured, nor dull the painful memories of those who have lost loved ones to the disease, it is our government's sincerest hope that today's announcement will provide a measure of closure to those who have suffered so much.

Today's announcement compensation will begin to flow just as soon as:

The terms of the final agreement between the Government and the counsel for the plaintiffs in the class action suits on this issue are finalized;

The approved agreement is found acceptable by Courts in four jurisdictions; and

An administrative structure is established to ensure the fair and efficient processing of eligible victims.

Granted, these steps aren't going to happen overnight.

But rest assured, our Government is going to do everything in its power to

ensure that matters are moved ahead as quickly as possible.

Because these men and women have waited long enough.

Thank you.

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