



## **Saskatchewan has Lowest Level of Occupational Therapists in Canada**

**Regina (December 7, 2011)** - Saskatchewan continues to have the lowest level of Occupational Therapists in Canada, resulting in long waiting lists for many critical services, and unsafe levels of access to others, according to the President of the Health Sciences Association of Saskatchewan, Karen Wasylenko.

“Saskatchewan’s population is growing, and the demand for health care services is growing, but health care employers refuse to adequately staff specialized health care professions like Occupational Therapy,” Wasylenko said.

“Canada-wide statistics for 2010, released recently by the *Canadian Institute for Health Information* (CIHI), show that last year in Saskatchewan there were only 271 Occupational Therapists, which represents 25.8 professionals per 100-thousand people. That was the lowest rate anywhere in Canada, and was sharply below the national average of 38.1 professionals per 100-thousand population,” Wasylenko noted.

“Occupational therapists work with individuals who have conditions, which are physically, cognitively, developmentally, socially or emotionally disabling. Their services speed recovery, promote health and facilitate independence and integration into the community after injury or illness. Health care employers have failed to hire adequate numbers of these and other specialized health care professionals. 2010 marked the fourth straight year that Saskatchewan had the lowest level of occupational therapists in Canada,” Wasylenko added.

“The lack of occupational therapists has pushed waiting lists for families whose children have autism or for those in community mental health programs to anywhere from six months to more than a year. This is an unacceptable level of public health care service,” Wasylenko said.

“Growing waiting lists for occupational therapist services are just one more example of how health care employers seem determined to balance their budgets on the backs of patients and health care professionals,” Wasylenko concluded.

Health Sciences is the union which represents more than three-thousand specialized health care professionals from more than thirty health care professions. Members include: Emergency care workers like Paramedics; Acute care workers like Hospital Pharmacists, Perfusionists, and Respiratory Therapists; Rehab professionals like Occupational Therapists, Physical Therapists and Speech Language Pathologists; and Community-based professionals like Public Health Inspectors, Psychologists and Social Workers.

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