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## **CANADIAN BLOOD SYSTEM VERY SAFE BUT ACCOUNTABILITY TAKES GIANT STEP BACKWARDS**

**Montreal – January 27, 2011** – The 2008-2010 report on Canada’s blood system, prepared by the Canadian Hemophilia Society (CHS), has found that blood, blood products and their alternatives are very safe and in sufficient supply; however, the system’s accountability to recipients has taken a giant step backwards.

According to Canadian Blood Services (CBS) by-laws, and following recommendations of the 1997 Krever Report on Canada’s Blood System, two of the 12 CBS Board positions are reserved for persons with “relevant knowledge or experience with organizations representing persons consuming blood and blood products.” Over the last decade, almost all of these positions have been held by individuals with very close links to recipient organizations and extensive knowledge of safety and supply issues. However, during the 2009 and 2010 Board renewal process, the Members of CBS, the provincial/territorial Ministers of Health (except Quebec), named both “public directors” with no apparent links to recipient organizations and little knowledge of key issues from a recipient perspective. A number of recipient organizations have denounced the selection process as lacking transparency and resulting in the exclusion of an effective recipient voice at the top level of decision-making at CBS... to no avail. David Page, CHS national executive director, said, “Members of recipient organizations see their exclusion as a clear contravention of CBS’ own by-laws, and a giant step backwards in accountability.”

Meanwhile, Héma-Québec has maintained Board positions for individuals with a recipient organization perspective.

On a more positive note, the report finds that CBS, Héma-Québec and Health Canada (the regulator of the blood system) have maintained a clear focus on safety. Blood and blood products are safer today than at any time in the past.

The provinces and territories continue to fund the suppliers of blood, blood products and their alternatives in such a way that they can provide life-saving products to Canadians in sufficient supply... with one exception. Solvent-detergent treated plasma (SD-plasma) is still unavailable, despite licensure by Health Canada in 2006, a lower risk of blood-borne pathogens and adverse reactions compared to fresh frozen plasma, and the fact that SD-plasma is the standard of care in many European countries.

The September 2010 decision by Justice Aitken of the Ontario Superior Court in the case of CBS vs. Freeman was welcomed by recipient organizations. The judgment found that current donor deferral criteria for men who have had sex with men are not discriminatory. As a result, decisions on screening procedures will continue to be made on the basis of the latest science and epidemiology.

The period covered by this report also saw the adoption of legislation in Quebec to provide no-fault compensation in the event that persons are injured by blood or blood products. Such a measure was the first recommendation of the Krever Commission. The other provinces and territories are relying on CBS' self-insurance scheme to provide compensation in the event of another tainted blood tragedy.

Unfortunately, the last three years have seen little progress in the development of a national Orphan Drug Policy that would facilitate the licensure and availability of therapies for rare diseases. Canada is the only highly developed nation without such a policy.

In addition, the Public Health Agency of Canada has, without notice or explanation, stopped funding the Blood-Borne Pathogen Surveillance Project at the University of Alberta. This bank of blood samples from frequently transfused individuals is critical to effective monitoring of emerging pathogens in the blood supply.

The 2008-2010 Report on Canada's Blood System is the fifth to be released since the reform of the blood system in 1998 following the Krever Commission. In its preparation, the Canadian Hemophilia Society sought input from recipient organizations, Health Canada, manufacturers of fresh blood components, Canadian Blood Services and Héma-Québec. The 2008-2010 report card and the four previous report cards can be found on the CHS Web site at [www.hemophilia.ca/en](http://www.hemophilia.ca/en) in the Safe, Secure Blood Supply section.

#### **ABOUT THE CANADIAN HEMOPHILIA SOCIETY (CHS)**

Founded in 1953, the Canadian Hemophilia Society (CHS) is a national voluntary health charity. Its mission is to improve the health and quality of life of all people with inherited bleeding disorders and ultimately to find a cure. Its vision is a world free from the pain and suffering of inherited bleeding disorders.

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