

SARS has again exposed some of the fundamental limitations of Canada's public health system, prompting calls for reform.<sup>1,2</sup> In response, the National Advisory Committee on SARS and Public Health has provided recommendations for public health renewal. A key recommendation is the creation of a Canadian Agency for Public Health, modelled on the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. By coordinating public health activities throughout the country and establishing a national public health strategy, the new agency would address some of the major concerns about the public health system. The question is, Will it work?

The SARS committee's proposal is the latest in a series of reports recommending the strengthening of Canada's public health capacity. One of the primary reasons previous reform initiatives have failed is the difficulty of obtaining cooperation among local, provincial/territorial and federal governments. This is due in part to unclear constitutional roles and responsibilities for public health and the potential for disputes to arise over funding and data sharing.<sup>4,5</sup> Furthermore, public health agreements have become casualties of the intergovernmental acrimony that has arisen over hospital and medical insurance.

When devising its plan for a new public health agency

Canadian Agency for Public Health clearly outweigh the disadvantages. The plan is an important and correct step to delivering much-needed reform. Now the federal government must demonstrate the political will to translate the committee's vision into reality.

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