To Hamilton City Council;

Immigration Minister Jason Kenney recently announced changes to health coverage for refugees that will have potentially devastating health impacts. The proposed changes are scheduled to take effect in less than two months, on June 30th, 2012

Newcomers migrate to Canada in two main ways: as immigrants and refugees. Immigrants can be economic immigrants who are high profile skilled workers and family class immigrants where permanent residents can sponsor family members to immigrate to Canada. Refugees however, come to Canada because they are in need of protection. Many have survived persecution, torture and imprisonment in their homelands. Many have lived in refugee camps or war zones during the course of their migration to Canada.

The current changes proposed by Minister Kenney will result in refugees being denied access to health care and medication coverage unless their illnesses ‘pose a risk to public safety’. This means they will not be able to access basic health care including vaccines, antibiotics or medications for chronic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, and heart disease. The effects on the health of these individuals will be immediate and significant, and threaten to place a higher cost on our health system in the long term. When the uncontrolled diabetic ends up in the emergency room or a pregnant woman who can't afford blood pressure medication delivers prematurely resulting in a stay in neonatal intensive care, the Canadian taxpayer will save no money.

Canada’s commitment to new refugees is based on our proud history of extending a humanitarian welcome to those at greatest risk as well as our commitment to international law. We urge Minister Kenney to retract these proposed changes to Interim Federal Health.

L. Redwood-Campbell, MD, FCFP, DTM&H, MPH
Associate Professor,
Global Health Coordinator
co-Chair, AFMC Resource Group
(immediate past Chair, Global Health Committee, CFPC)
Department of Family Medicine
McMaster University
175 Longwood Road South suite 201A
Hamilton, Ontario Canada
SMS- 1-905-220-2117
skpe- lynda.redwood.campbell