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Dear Stakeholder:

As you may know, on April 8, 2008, the Government of Canada introduced amendments to the Food and Drugs Act. These amendments mark the first comprehensive modernization of Canada's food and health product safety laws in 50 years, and are aimed at strengthening the regulatory system by preventing problems in the first place, targeting products that represent the highest risk, and providing rapid response to problems when they do occur.

Recently, concerns have been raised about Bill C-51's possible impact on the availability and use of natural health products. This issue is of particular concern to communities that have long traditions of complementary or alternative medicine. I'm writing to you today as a person who may have a keen interest, in order to provide you with important information on the proposed amendments, which you will find attached.

The perspectives of our stakeholders on Bill C-51 are important to the Government of Canada, and since the Bill's introduction, Health Canada representatives have travelled to several cities in Canada to meet and hear the views of interested Canadians. You will be receiving an invitation shortly from Health Canada for a meeting where we hope to hear your views and answer any questions you may have about Bill C-51.

In the interim, I invite you to go to our Healthy Canadians website, http://healthycanadians.ca/pr-rp/billC-51_e.html, or call 1-866-891-4542 if you have any concerns or comments you would like to share with us.

I hope that this information provides you with assurance that our goal in introducing amendments to the Food and Drugs Act has been and remains to provide Canadians with access to safe and high quality health products, including natural health products.

Tony Clement
Minister of Health

Bill C-51: Questions and Answers

Will Bill C-51 affect the availability or use of traditional ingredients or foods?

There has been concern that the Bill will impact the use of herbs and spices in the preparation of traditional foods. The spices and herbs used for traditional foods are not considered to be natural health products, and Bill C-51 does not change this. Bill C-51 in no way affects the way Canadians grow, buy or use herbs and spices to prepare foods, and has no impact on the way traditional foods are prepared.

Will Bill C-51 restrict the availability of natural health products to the public?

No. In Canada, natural health products are regulated, and will continue to be regulated, under their own unique set of regulations, namely the Natural Health Products Regulations, which came into force in 2004. These regulations define "natural health product", and establish measures to ensure that natural health products are safe, effective and of high quality. Bill C-51 does nothing to change these regulations and in fact supports the principle that different types of products should be regulated differently.

Will Bill C-51 require people to obtain a prescription in order to access natural health products?

No. There is nothing in Bill C-51 that changes the regulatory status of natural health products from their current non-prescription status. Natural health products will continue to be regulated under the Natural Health Product Regulations, and Canadians will continue to be able to self-select and self-administer natural health products that are safe, effective and of high quality.

Will Bill C-51 require that retailers get a license?

No. Bill C-51 would not require the licensing of NHP retailers, for example health food stores, that simply sell these products. The activities that would be controlled by the Act are clearly identified in the Bill, and are the following: manufacturing, packaging, labelling and importation of natural health products for commercial sale and distribution in Canada. Selling NHPs by retailers would not be a controlled activity. Canadians

will continue to be able to buy NHPs from their local retailer.

Will Bill C-51 stop parents from giving natural health products to their children?

No. The Bill has no impact on the personal use of NHPs by Canadians, including parents who give natural health products to their children. Rather, the bill supports improved safeguards so that parents and caregivers can be confident that the health products they choose are safe, effective and of high quality. Consumers will continue to be able to make their own informed choices for themselves and for their families on the use of natural health products.

Will Bill C-51 restrict the activities of complementary health care professionals?

No. Bill C-51 does not apply to health care practitioners, such as Traditional Chinese Medicine, Ayurvedic or Unani practitioners, who will continue to be able to access products for their practice and to compound products on an individual basis as part of a treatment regime for their patients. The relationship between practitioner and patient falls under the definition of "practice of medicine" and is under provincial jurisdiction. Bill C-51 respects this arrangement.

Will Bill C-51 result in stricter and more frequent enforcement action against natural health products?

No. Bill C-51 contains important amendments that update the current compliance and enforcement portions of the Food and Drugs Act, which are over 50 years old. Canada lags significantly behind other parts of the world in this area, especially the United States, Europe, and Australia. The compliance and enforcement proposals in the Bill, while allowing the government to more effectively respond to risks, will not result in more enforcement action against natural health products or any other regulated product, and will not allow government inspectors to enter private homes without consent or a warrant. In fact, the approach to compliance and enforcement activities for natural health products will stay the same, and will continue to be guided by current policies and requirements. Any decision to take action will respect the rights of Canadians and be based on the same risk-based principles that are used today: the higher the risk posed by a product, the greater the likelihood of compliance and enforcement action.

How can I make my views known on Bill C-51?

Bill C-51 is currently in the legislative process. Before it can become law, it will be thoroughly reviewed by the House of Commons, by the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health and by the Senate. In addition to this review, in which Canadians will have the opportunity to express their views, the Government of Canada is also pursuing additional measures to help the public learn more and provide their perspectives. Please visit our Healthy Canadians website, http://healthycanadians.ca/pr-rp/billC-51_e.html, or call 1-866-891-4542 to share your concerns or comments.