

# Health Workforce Action Plan Highlights



2007 to 2016

## *Addressing Alberta's Health Workforce Shortages*

The development of a comprehensive health workforce strategy is part of the Alberta government's commitment to attract and retain the health professionals needed in our province today and into the future. Listening to, and working with, the health sector is crucial to meeting the need for more health providers and in ensuring Alberta's health workforce has the capacity to make change happen.

With this in mind, there are two components of Alberta's comprehensive health workforce strategy: a Health Workforce Action Plan led by government and a health workforce strategy coordinated by government yet led by employers, educators, associations, unions and regulatory bodies. The latter strategy will be developed by health stakeholders by the end of March 2008, with the leadership of Alberta Employment, Immigration and Industry (EII) and the support of Alberta Health and Wellness (AHW). It will identify priorities the health sector will take action on to help address workforce challenges on the frontlines.

Three ministries collaborated on the development of the Health Workforce Action Plan: AHW; EII; and Alberta Advanced Education and Technology (AET).

# Health Workforce Action Plan

The Health Workforce Action Plan is a nine-year plan for government to promote systemic change in Alberta's health system and to support the health sector in addressing immediate and future health workforce needs. It focuses on changing the workforce to support changes in service delivery and also expanding the capacity of the workforce to ensure an adequate supply of health workers. The action plan contains five strategic policy directions, examples of initiatives currently underway and 19 proposed action areas.

## Health Workforce Action Plan Vision:

*A supply and distribution of health providers that best meets the health service needs of Albertans.*

### Strategies and Actions:

Changing the Workforce - To achieve a sustainable, accessible health system that provides quality care for all Albertans, the health workforce must change how services are delivered and must develop new approaches to utilizing, retaining and recruiting the health workforce. The best way to support systemic changes in service delivery is to redefine who can provide care as well as where and how health care is provided. Moving forward in this area will require a flexible health workforce that can respond easily to change.

#### Strategic Policy Direction: Move to Client-centered, Evidence-based Services

##### Proposed Actions:

- 1 - Creating Community-based, Client-centered Teams: To improve access to the health system and health outcomes for Albertans, teams of various health-care providers need to offer a range of health promotion and self-care services to meet patient needs in community settings.
- 2 - Creating Rural Health and Wellness Centres: Health and wellness sites should be created in rural Alberta and be linked to rural post-secondary campuses or regional health facilities in order to offer more comprehensive health promotion and wellness programs.

#### Strategic Policy Direction: Introduce New Service Delivery Models

##### Proposed Actions:

- 3 - Introducing New and Expanded Provider Roles: To increase patient access to the health services they need, existing health providers should be used differently and new provider roles should be introduced.
- 4 - Implementing Common Courses for Health Programs: Working with the appropriate regulatory bodies, post-secondary educational institutions should be encouraged to develop more common courses for health programs that promote efficiencies and inter-professional teamwork.
- 5 - Developing a Rural Health Workforce Strategy: A Rural Health Workforce Strategy should be developed using the learnings from the Rural Physician Action Plan to increase the number of non-physician health providers in rural Alberta.
- 6 - Creating a Virtual Campus and Rural Mentoring: Delivering post-secondary medical education through a 'virtual campus' in rural areas would alleviate space pressures in urban universities, provide more educational opportunities in rural Alberta and encourage more graduates to choose rural practice. Distance mentoring in rural areas would increase retention rates of rural physicians and ultimately improve the quality of care that patients receive in rural Alberta.

## Strategic Policy Direction: Ensure Flexibility for Change

### Proposed Actions:

7 - **Upgrading Skills of Health-care Aides:** Funding is necessary to cover employers' costs of filling temporary labour vacancies while health-care aides receive further training or upgrading.

8 - **Making Practice Improvements:** Funding is needed to assist with clinical office redesign in various health settings to maximize efficiency and quality of patient care.

9 - **Providing Professional Development Bursaries:** Funding is required to assist with professional development costs.

**Expanding the Capacity of the Workforce –** It is important that all facilities across Alberta have the right number, and the right type, of health-care providers to meet the needs of Albertans. An increased understanding of the factors contributing to recruitment and retention success is needed, and the capacity of educational institutions and employers to train health-care providers should be expanded.

## Strategic Policy Direction: Retain Existing Health Workforce

### Proposed Actions:

10 - **Making Health-care Aide Wage Adjustments:** Funding is necessary to increase wages for health-care aides and to assist with health-care aide recruitment in the continuing care sector.

11 - **Reducing and Avoiding Injury:** Equipment should be purchased to reduce workplace injuries and to find ways to prevent or reduce staff absenteeism due to accidents or illness.

12 - **Using Technology to Increase Efficiency and Productivity:** Technology should be implemented in health-care settings to improve productivity and decrease the workload on health providers.

## Strategic Policy Direction: Recruit Health Workforce

### Proposed Actions:

13 - **Expanding Health Training Programs:** Health professions facing shortages by 2016 must be targeted for program expansions.

14 - **Increasing Clinical Training Capacity:** Funding is necessary to ensure students have enough space for more practical training opportunities in clinical settings, and to expand these opportunities in rural settings.

15 - **Increasing Aboriginal Albertans' Participation in the Health Workforce:** Partnerships between regional health authorities and the federal and provincial governments should identify strategies to encourage aboriginal Albertans to pursue health-related careers.

16 - **Attracting Health Professionals Working Abroad to Alberta:** Government and health employers should partner on international marketing and recruitment campaigns to attract health professionals working in other countries, including the repatriation of Albertans now working abroad.

17 - **Creating a Health Career and Skills Assessment Network:** The establishment of a network is necessary to provide provincially co-ordinated assessment and career guidance for internationally educated health professionals and for Albertans.

18 - Expanding Clinical Assistant Training Programs: Additional spots should be added annually to clinical assistant programs to help the health regions provide services and make better use of the skills of international medical graduates in Alberta who cannot be licensed for independent practice.

19 - Increasing Access to Anesthetic Service: Funding is necessary for family physicians to complete additional anesthetic training, for anesthetic training capacity expansion and to consider the use of other professionals in anesthetic service delivery.

### *Funding:*

**Government has approved \$30 million in 2007-08 to implement initiatives in the Health Workforce Action Plan.** Funding for remaining actions will be determined through future budget processes. This is how the money is being invested in 2007-08:

- Developing a Rural Health Workforce Strategy (Action 5) - \$2 million
- Upgrading Skills of Health-care Aides (Action 7) - \$3.2 million
- Making Practice Improvements (Action 8) - \$3 million
- Providing Professional Development Bursaries (Action 9) - \$2.5 million
- Expanding Health Training Programs (Action 13) - \$5.2 million
- Increasing Clinical Training Capacity (Action 14) - \$5 million
- Attracting Health Professionals Working Abroad to Alberta (Action 16) - \$3.8 million
- Creating a Health Career and Skills Assessment Network (Action 17) - \$5.3 million

Total: \$30 million

AHW will take the lead in implementing the government actions approved for funding in this plan, with support from EII and AET. Regular and ongoing evaluation will be done to measure the impact of each action, to measure outcomes and to determine whether the plan needs to be changed in any way to address emerging issues.

Implementing these actions will be a significant move forward in addressing the need for more health providers and in ensuring Alberta's health workforce has the capacity to make change happen. Implementing the actions within the Health Workforce Action Plan will help to achieve a sustainable, accessible health system that provides quality care for all Albertans.

For additional copies of this document or to obtain a copy of the entire Health Workforce Action Plan, please visit [www.health.alberta.ca](http://www.health.alberta.ca) or contact:

Alberta Health and Wellness Communications  
22<sup>nd</sup> Floor, Telus Plaza North Tower  
10025 Jasper Avenue  
Edmonton, Alberta T5J 1S6

Phone: 310 0000 if you live outside the Edmonton area, or (780) 427 7164 if you live in the Edmonton area.

E-mail: [ahinform@health.gov.ab.ca](mailto:ahinform@health.gov.ab.ca)