

HIGHLIGHTS FROM

Alberta's New Health Policy

A 10-POINT PLAN FOR A STRONG, PATIENT-FOCUSED PUBLIC HEALTH CARE SYSTEM



As part of the Third Way, the Alberta government has adopted 10 new policy directions for health renewal. These policies will give Albertans what they've been asking for - more options, increased access to health care services and a sustainable public health care system.

"It starts with the fundamental commitment that a person's ability to pay will never determine their ability to access health care in Alberta." - Premier Ralph Klein, January 2005.

Alberta

Alberta's New Health Policy Framework has been created after many years of listening to Albertans and health experts. Extensive consultation took place during Health Summit 1999, and before and after the release of the Premier's Advisory Council on Health Report in 2001. The Alberta Symposium on Health, held in May 2005, was attended by international experts and hundreds of Albertans representing diverse organizations and interest groups. A Third Way Action Plan was released in July 2005. The announcement of a new Health Policy Framework is one component in that action plan.

1

Putting patients at the center

Alberta's health care system must be focused on the patient so Albertans receive the highest quality of care. The system is there to serve patients. Albertans will be encouraged to think more about their health and to make good decisions about wellness and treatment.

Benefits: Albertans will be empowered to take more control over their own health and to make decisions that work for themselves and their families.

2

Promoting flexibility in scope of practice of health professionals

It only makes sense to use the caregiver who can best treat us when we're ill. When caregivers like pharmacists, nurses and other professionals work together to decide what treatment would be best, we will receive the most thorough treatment. Options will also be provided for people to seek help from the practitioner they are most comfortable with.

Benefits: Health care providers will work better together to provide improved access to health care. The system will be more efficient because the skills of health providers will be better matched to patient needs.

3

Implementing new compensation models

How health care professionals are paid has not kept up with changes in how services are delivered. Payment models need to reflect a team approach to care and allow for health care services to be provided by the most appropriate health care professional.

Benefits: Health care providers will be able to go above and beyond what they do now to provide the highest quality service. This will lead to better results and better value for money.

4

Strengthening inter-regional collaboration

Health regions will work together in new and better ways so that patients receive co-ordinated care no matter where they live.

Benefits: Health regions will collaborate more and compete less, which means patients have less red tape in accessing the health services they need across the province.

5

Reshaping the role of hospitals

Hospitals will be used in smarter ways across Alberta. If faster procedures can be given at a hospital in a different region, patients will have the option of going there. Or, it may make more sense to stay at your home hospital with the support of family both before and after surgery in a bigger centre.

Benefits: Albertans will receive the quality care they need in the most appropriate location.

Health Policy Vision: Alberta is a world leader in health and wellness, is open to continuous improvement based on the best ideas and innovations, and has a shared responsibility for quality and responsive service.

Action Plan Announced July 2005

ACTION 1

Put an overall health policy in place

ACTION 2

Improve access and efficiency

ACTION 3

Get serious about wellness and injury prevention

ACTION 4

Make children's health the top priority

ACTION 5

Improve access to mental health services

Related Accomplishments

- Health Policy Framework released (*February 2006*)
- \$1.4 billion for 20 capital projects (*October 2005*)
- Premier's Award for Healthy Workplaces recognizes employers with healthy workplace programs (*November 2005*)
- Smoke Free Places Act (*In effect January 2006*)
- Over 30 new projects share \$75 million over three years to improve access to mental health services (*November 2005*)

The purpose of these policy directions is to help guide health leaders as they tackle some of the difficult challenges of the 21st century. The framework promotes broader thinking and creativity as we search for ways to better organize, deliver and pay for health services. Many of the ideas have been successful in other places. As we move forward we will evaluate, gather evidence and make adjustments. The goal is for a more responsive and sustainable health system for Albertans now and in the years to come.

6

Establishing parameters for publicly-funded health services

Today, one-third of Alberta's budget goes toward health care. If current spending trends continue, health care will consume Alberta's entire budget in 25 years. To make sure the system will be there when Albertans need it, we need to think about what future services, new technologies and pharmaceuticals may be included in the public health system in the years ahead. Options must be available so Albertans can decide for themselves how best to pay for any services that may not be covered by the government.

Benefits: Essential health services will still be publicly funded. No one will be denied access to the services they need because of an inability to pay. The growth in health spending will be better managed so a strong system will be there for future generations.

7

Creating long-term sustainability and flexible funding options

To ensure the health care system is there for Albertans in the years ahead and to give Albertans more options, the government is looking at ways to pay for services like prescription drugs and continuing care. It may mean Albertans can buy insurance for things like taking care of loved ones in long-term care.

Benefits: Not only will purchasing insurance give Albertans more options to plan for the future, but it will make the system more affordable in the long-term. Then health care won't eat up so much of the provincial budget and government will be able to spend more money on other things that affect our health.

8

Expanding system capacity

To make sure there is room in the health care system when patients need to get in, options will be available in both the public and private health care systems where wait times are the greatest. The number of skilled health professionals in Alberta will be increased by working with professional teaching institutions that provide on-site training.

Benefits: More health care providers in both the public and private sectors means more options and less waiting.

9

Paying for choice and access while protecting the public system

Albertans want improved options for health care while maintaining essential services in the public health system. To make this happen, patients may be given the option of purchasing services they're waiting for now - like hip, knee or cataract surgery. The private health care system will be closely monitored by government. Albertans will continue receiving essential health care services in the public health system, regardless of their ability to pay.

Benefits: Giving Albertans the option to access private health providers for certain services will reduce wait times.

10

Deriving economic benefits from health services and research

Alberta has a wonderful reputation for world class health and research facilities. This reputation will grow by marketing innovations around the world that are developed right here in Alberta.

Benefits: These innovations will benefit our health, while supporting Alberta's strong economy and world-class reputation. More health care providers will come to Alberta to work, and those who are already here will stay because of our international reputation.

ACTION 6

Implement an electronic health record for all Albertans

ACTION 7

Expand primary health care

ACTION 8

Make changes to legislation and regulations

ACTION 9

Control spiralling drug costs and increase coverage

ACTION 10

Improve quality in long term care

ACTION 11

Increase the supply of health care providers

ACTION 12

Address the health needs of rural communities

ACTION 13

Supplementary health insurance

- \$189 million invested to digitize X-rays, CT and MRI scans (*July 2005*)
- Changes in continuing care recommended (*September 2005*)
- Government responds to continuing care report (*February 2006*)
- Bursaries support training for Aboriginal students in health care careers (*September 2005*)
- Approximately 20 new Primary Care Networks will begin operating in 2006 (*Throne Speech 2006*)



These new health policies will build on one another to create a health care system that focuses on patient needs, provides improved access to services and increases options about personal health and wellness. Albertans will always be able to count on a strong public system that strives to be a world leader in health and wellness.

For more information about these 10 policy directions, or to obtain a copy of Alberta's Health Policy Framework, please contact 310-4455 or visit www.health.gov.ab.ca.