

Health Express

ON TRACK FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

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Vision 2020: The Future of Health Care in Alberta

Alberta's health care prospects, which began under the 2008 Health Action Plan, are transitioning in 2009 to *Vision 2020: The Future of Health Care in Alberta*.

Vision 2020 contains five key strategic goals to improve Alberta's health-care system.

The recent release of the continuing care and pharmaceutical strategies are two examples of future initiatives, featured in this edition of *Health Express*, that are targeted to reinforce and strengthen the following five goals.

1 Providing the right service, in the right place and at the right time

This goal is about matching health services to patient needs. Patients can receive a number of services outside of hospital and long-term care settings. Increasing the number of community-based health services such as physician clinics and urgent care centres that have expanded hours for less serious emergencies, or providing more supportive living options for seniors will free up hospital beds for other patients who urgently need them and will provide a better quality of patient care.

Government's vision is for a patient-focused health system delivered by an integrated

health-care team of health providers such as physicians, nurses, pharmacists, physical therapists and health-care support workers. This system would be able to match services and infrastructure to the patient to provide the right level of care and the right provider at the right time, in a cost-effective way.

2 Enhancing access to high quality services in rural areas

This goal involves ways to improve the quality and accessibility of health care in rural areas, including increasing telehealth options, integrating emergency medical services more fully into all



health services, and expanding the roles of selected rural hospitals. Rural communities should have health services designed to meet their needs, with local services well co-ordinated and integrated to more complex care that is typically provided in larger centres.

3 Matching workforce supply to demand for services

Alberta needs a modern health system with health professionals who work in multi-disciplinary teams and have increased flexibility to work to the full extent of their education, skill
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and experience. As more room in the health system is created and efficiency is increased, patient access to the system will improve. At the same time, well managed retention and incentive initiatives will increase workforce satisfaction and productivity.

4 Improving co-ordination and delivery of care

This goal is for patients to receive health care no matter where they live while at the same time using health resources as effectively as possible. This includes using care teams, patient navigators, better management of pharmaceutical spending and drug benefit

programs, as well as increased use of information technology.

5 Building a strong foundation for public health

Building a strong foundation for public health is about services that prevent disease and injury, promote health, protect the health of the population and ongoing measuring and monitoring of Albertans' health. Public health services are the foundation from which to build a more effective and sustainable health system now and into the future.

Families, schools, communities and government share the

responsibility of ensuring that infants, children and youth have access to resources that promote optimal mental health and well-being. Government's vision is that all Albertans - including babies, children and adults - should be healthy, active and have the resiliency to respond positively to life's challenges.

By implementing the goals identified in *Vision 2020*, Alberta's health system will focus on patients' needs. Efficiencies in health service delivery will also increase, quality care will improve, and the health system will be sustainable for future generations. ■

Alberta Pharmaceutical Strategy introduces improvements to drug coverage

Low-income seniors will benefit

Significant improvements to drug coverage and the drug approval process will be implemented in the months ahead as part of the new Alberta Pharmaceutical Strategy. Seniors, in particular, will benefit under this plan. About 60 per cent will receive free drug coverage or pay less for their prescription drugs. Phase one of the strategy includes these key changes:

- Low-income seniors will not pay for drug coverage and other seniors will pay a deductible based on their income. A co-payment of up to \$25 per prescription will no longer be required when the new plan becomes effective January 1, 2010.
- Non-group coverage premiums will be adjusted to make these rates comparable to those of employer and private plans. A premium increase will be phased in over two years, beginning in July 2009.
- A single, government-sponsored drug plan will be established along with a common drug list. Free drug coverage will continue to be provided to Albertans who currently receive free coverage through a government program.
- A program to cover drug costs for Albertans with extremely rare diseases resulting from genetic disorders will be introduced in April 2009.



- The drug review process will become more timely and transparent. A new committee will be formed to provide public input, drug review guidelines and target timelines will be established and a process for independent consideration will be introduced to address the needs of patients for whom standard drug treatments are not effective.

Phase two of the strategy is under development and more details will be announced in 2009. Phase two will include an expanded role for pharmacists and more cost-effective drug purchasing. ■

More continuing care choices for Albertans now and in the future

Community supports, supportive-living options and upgrades to long-term care facilities are the highlights in a new continuing care strategy for Albertans called *Aging in the Right Place*. The new strategy outlines specific directions and programs that will be implemented over the next three years. As a result of the new directions, seniors and persons with disabilities will have more options in where they receive health and personal care services.

Health and Wellness Minister Ron Liepert led the creation of the strategy along with the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports Mary Anne Jablonski to provide more community living supports so seniors and those with disabilities can receive care in their homes and communities, where they are the healthiest and most comfortable. The new strategy also offers low-income seniors and persons with disabilities more affordable accommodations and equitable drug coverage. Those who currently qualify for subsidized housing and no-cost medications will continue to receive those benefits.

Programs from the continuing care strategy were developed in consultation with Albertans and is part of the direction outlined in the *Vision 2020 Future of Health Care in Alberta* report. Go online to www.health.alberta.ca to read more about the *Aging in the Right Place* strategy. ■

Aging in the Right Place strategic directions and programs

1. Investing in Community Supports

- Investment in home care funding - Enhance and expand home support services, increase daily care hours and expand self-managed care program.
- Health system navigation - Assist Albertans with accessing the appropriate health and personal care programs and provide guidance on accommodations.
- Transitions back to the community - Assess residents of long-term care facilities and acute care hospitals beds for community placement opportunities.
- Emergency department support - Provide a response team that will support emergency room patients in finding more appropriate community-living options.
- Caregiver support and enhanced respite - Provide support services and respite programs for family and informal caregivers.
- Community initiatives - Provide support to communities that will assist seniors and persons with disabilities to age in community settings.
- Dedicated health technology funding - Introduce technology for health and safety monitoring.

2. Building infrastructure that meets “aging in the right place” vision

- Replace 7,000 long-term care beds by 2015.
- Improve investment model for the operation and development of new long-term care facilities.
- Support the development of 1,225 additional affordable supportive living spaces.

3. Changing the way long-term care accommodations are paid

- Increase incentives to encourage non-profit and private investment.
- Allow for enhanced service options.
- Continue government support for those in need.

4. Funding individuals based on needs and/or fund operators

- Develop new funding model that will allow Albertans the opportunity to direct health and personal care services where they wish.

5. Providing equitable pharmaceutical coverage wherever you live

- Provide equitable pharmaceutical coverage for seniors and persons with disabilities based on their needs - as outlined in the pharmaceutical strategy for Alberta.

A health journey in review

This past year has been nothing short of exciting. Given the eventful year, the holidays provide an opportune moment to stop, catch one's breath and review the many accomplishments made since I arrived at Alberta Health and Wellness.

I have found the department to be both challenging and invigorating. The challenges have been finding fresh and workable solutions to make the health care system sustainable, while working with Alberta's health partners and stakeholders has been most rewarding and invigorating.

The year started with a Health Action Plan that reviewed governance and accountability, health workforce issues, access to services, and healthy and safe communities. Alberta Health Services became the new head of nine health regions, AADAC, the cancer board and the mental health board with a goal of improved communication so health-care needs of Albertans could be addressed more quickly.

Other key health care initiatives addressed emergency health services, health care insurance premiums, prevention and sterilization measures, funding of midwives, mental health services for children, addictions in youth, a pharmaceutical plan, continuing care strategies and healthier lifestyles both at home and in the workplace.



This province's health care system is moving forward due to hard work from a team of knowledgeable, adaptable, and dedicated individuals with an attitude that says it can be done. From what I have experienced, the commitment to excellence and quality defines the team at Health and Wellness, and all those who support the many day-to-day health issues we face as a province.

This government is dedicated to building a health care model that gives Albertans access to health services as they need it and closer to their home settings. Change takes time and with Albertans support, I am confident we will be successful in achieving a bright health care future through Vision 2020. Just look at the number of decisions and changes that have been accomplished in a very short time.

With the New Year approaching, resolutions to strive for improved fitness by eating smart, moving more and through finding personal balance are made in anticipation for new beginnings. I hope you have the opportunity to enjoy the many blessings around you and in what this province has to offer. Merry Christmas and I wish you all a safe and happy holiday season.

I look forward to meeting the opportunities of the New Year with you.

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Minister of Alberta Health and Wellness

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