

2000 **A New
Century**

*Bold plans
for Health in Alberta*

February 2000

Alberta
GOVERNMENT OF ALBERTA

Health care is the number one concern of Albertans and a major issue facing all Canadian provinces. Albertans want to be assured that today and in the years to come:

- Alberta's health system is there when they need it.
- Alberta's health system provides the best possible care.
- Alberta's health system provides the necessary care without long waiting times.
- Alberta's health system has an adequate supply of highly trained health professionals working together as a team to meet people's health care needs.
- Alberta's health system will continue to improve and continue to help Albertans improve their own health.

Albertans also want to be reassured that:

- Albertans will not have to pay for medically necessary services.
- Nobody will be able to pay to jump the queue and get faster service.
- There will be no two-tiered health system in the province.

Alberta has a good health system now, but across Canada and around the world health systems are changing. Albertans understand that this province's health system also needs to evolve to meet the ever-changing health needs of Albertans.

Alberta's ever-increasing and aging population, new medical treatments, new technologies, new drugs, and new ways of keeping people healthy are creating more demands and more challenges for the health system.

To ensure the long-term viability and sustainability of Alberta's publicly funded and publicly administered health system, that system must continue to adapt and change. The status quo is not an option.

Guided by the recommendations of last year's Health Summit, the Alberta government has developed a six-point plan to protect and improve the publicly funded and publicly administered health system in the province.

The six-point plan includes:

- 1) Improve access to quality publicly funded health services.
- 2) Improve the management of the health system.
- 3) Enhance the quality of health services.
- 4) Increase emphasis on promoting wellness for Albertans and preventing disease and accidents.
- 5) Foster new ideas to improve the health system.
- 6) Protect the publicly funded health system.

Albertans want government to take action on health. Much has been accomplished over the past several years, and Alberta leads the nation in reforming and improving the health system. The following initiatives will put government's six-point plan into action.



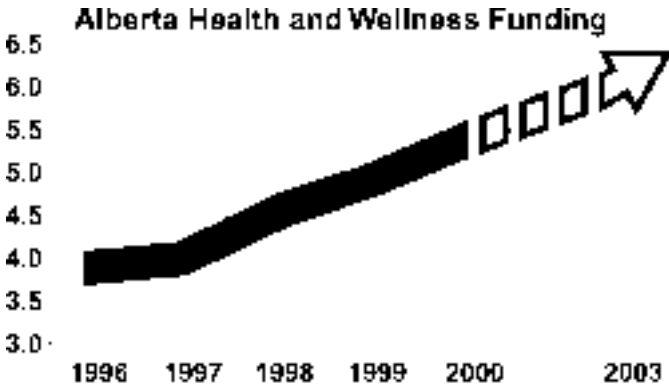
1. Improve access to quality publicly funded health services

- **Ensure adequate funding for the health system**

Health system funding has increased by more than \$1.5 billion over the past four years, or 40%. This year, government spending on the publicly funded health system is \$5.2 billion or \$14 million each and every day. In addition, one-time funding of \$280 million was provided this year.

Health spending is higher than it has ever been in the history of the province. This year, on an age-adjusted per capita basis, Alberta is spending more on health than any other province in the country. Health is government’s highest priority, representing fully one-third of all spending.

To keep pace with the growing and aging population and new treatments and services, spending on the publicly funded health system will continue to increase. In excess of \$1.0 billion more will be added over the next three years, an increase of 21%. In 2002-03, Alberta will be spending over \$6.2 billion a year on the publicly funded health system.

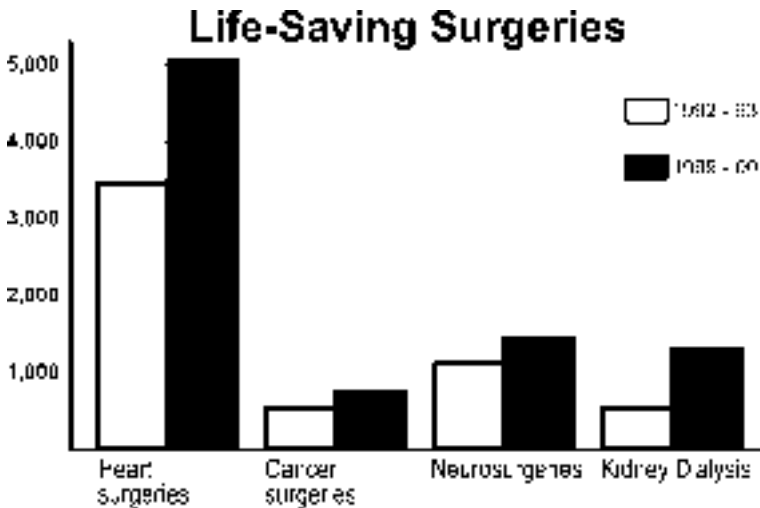


Source: Alberta Health and Wellness

- **Reduce Waiting Times for Life-Saving Surgeries and Procedures**

As the population continues to grow and age, there is increased need for key, life-saving surgeries. Additional funding will be targeted specifically at increasing the number of these surgeries being performed, including neurosurgery, cardiovascular surgery and cancer surgery.

The number of these procedures being done in Alberta's health system has rapidly increased over the past few years and these increases will continue this coming year. For example, major heart surgeries and procedures increased from 3,368 in 1992-93 to well over 5,000 in 1999-2000. Major cancer surgeries increased from 590 in 1992-93 to over 750 this year. Major neurosurgeries went from 1,043 in 1992-93 to over 1,350 this year. And the number of Albertans receiving life-saving kidney dialysis increased from 586 in 1992-93 to an estimated 1,300 this year.



- **Increase the number of physicians, nurses and other health professionals working in the health system**

As the demand for health services increases and the population grows, it is essential to ensure the province has an adequate number of health professionals, with the necessary skills, located in the right parts of the province. Additional funding will enable health authorities to hire more nurses and other front-line staff. More physicians, both family doctors and specialists, will be supported through an increased medical services budget.

In the current year's budget, additional funding was targeted to hire 1,000 more front-line health professionals in the health authorities. As of September 1999, this additional funding has actually resulted in an increase of 1,173 positions, including over 600 nurses. There will be further increases this coming year. As well, Alberta Learning has announced an additional 195 spaces in post-secondary institutions to train new nurses.

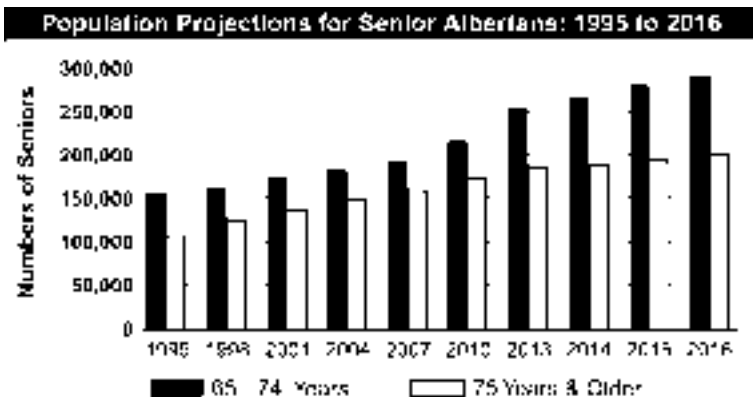
The number of physicians practicing in Alberta also has been steadily increasing over the past few years, including an increase of 255 doctors from September 1998 to September 1999. A further increase is expected this year. In cooperation with the Alberta Medical Association, the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta, Alberta medical schools and the health authorities, government is now completing a comprehensive Physician Resource Plan for Alberta. This plan will provide further advice and direction to help ensure Albertans have appropriate access to physician services in the years to come.

As a first step, the number of post-graduate residency positions in Alberta's medical schools will be increased this year.

- **Increase access to home care and continuing care**

Albertans generally prefer to remain as long as possible in their own homes and communities, rather than being institutionalized for acute or long term care. Given the province’s rising and aging population, there will be a need for a greater capacity in communities in the years to come. Therefore, Alberta is taking a leadership role in its support for home care and assisted living. However, institutional care will continue to be there for those who need it.

The number of Albertans receiving home care in Alberta has increased from 53,000 in 1992-93 to over 70,000 this year, and the total number of hours of home care has increased from 2.3 million to almost 6 million.



Source: Alberta Ministry of Health Population Projections 1995-2011
 Statistics Canada, *Great Force of Alberta Population Projections 2012-2016*

Beginning this year, an additional \$15 million per year is being provided to regional health authorities to address the increasing need, including expanding home care services and increasing continuing care services for Alberta’s seniors.

Recognizing that there will also be some Albertans who will require a higher level of care than can be provided in their homes, a \$115 million allocation announced in November will fund 1,090 new and upgraded continuing care beds over the next three years. This includes the replacement of 720 existing beds in older facilities and 370 additional new beds. When combined with other projects currently underway, nearly 2,000 new or upgraded beds, including 650 additional beds, will be available to aging Albertans.

Waiting lists for continuing care beds will decrease; fewer acute care beds will be occupied by patients who could be cared for more appropriately in continuing care facilities; and more Albertans will be able to remain in their own homes and communities with the support and assistance of home care.

2. Improve the management of the health system

- **Establish a Health Services Utilization Commission**

It is increasingly important to be able to show that the health system is effectively meeting Alberta's health needs. Analysis of the use and delivery of health services provides accurate information to help make the decisions that continuously improve health outcomes and the management of the health system.

In the coming months, a new Health Services Utilization Commission will be launched in Alberta to enhance public accountability of the health system and to do the kind of research and analysis that will support improved management and delivery of health services.

- **Launch Health Innovation Fund Projects**

The Health Innovation Fund is a \$10 million fund established this year to support health authorities and other health care providers look for innovations in health service delivery and health system management.

The Health Innovation Fund Advisory Committee is currently reviewing project proposals submitted by health care providers earlier this year. In the coming weeks, government will be announcing the launch of approximately 20 of the most innovative and promising of these projects. The Fund, through these projects, aims to improve patient access to services, better integrate the delivery of health services, ensure the affordability of the health system and enhance health outcomes for Albertans.

3. Enhance the Quality of Health Services

- **Reform the Delivery of Primary Care**

From 1998-2000, Alberta Health and Wellness, with support from the federal Health Transition Fund (HTF), is funding 26 diverse primary health care projects, most involving regional health authorities. The projects are community based, with many focusing on health professionals working together in teams. One of the objectives is to help Albertans get the care they need, from the person who can best provide it, while minimizing the need to use acute care hospitals and emergency wards. These initiatives will be studied and evaluated to determine what will work best for the future health system.

A rigorous, independent evaluation is being conducted of each project, focusing on process and outcomes in individual projects related to six national dimensions of inquiry (e.g., access, quality, impact on population, cost-effectiveness, and transferability). Key learning will be widely disseminated across Alberta and Canada to influence the practice of primary health care by regional health authorities and others.

Primary care projects are located in Calgary, Airdrie, Okotoks, Edmonton, Bonnyville, Brooks, Elnora, and other rural parts of the province.

In addition, Alberta Health and Wellness and the Alberta Medical Association are cooperating on another seven pilot projects focusing on the integration of physician services with non-physician health services and examining new methods of physician service delivery and funding. Several of these projects also directly support primary care reform.

These Alternative Payment Plan projects include the Crowfoot Village Family Practice in Calgary, the Bassano Community Health Centre, the Colonel Belcher Veterans Centre in Calgary, the Northeast Community Health Centre in Edmonton, the Calgary Chronic Non-Malignant Pain Project in Calgary, the Choice Program for the Frail Elderly in Edmonton, and the Gross Multidisciplinary Pain Management Network in Edmonton.

Finally, government will encourage greater partnership and teamwork among health professionals to make the best use of those professionals. This will include looking at new ways to use nurse practitioners and implementing the new *Health Professions Act*.

- **Purchase New High-Tech Medical Equipment**

In November 1999, an additional allocation of \$10 million for the purchase of high-cost medical equipment and new technology was announced. The intent of these one-time funds is to address priority high-cost medical equipment needs that could not be met with this year's lottery grant allocation of \$7.3 million announced in September 1999.

The health authorities and boards have identified their priorities, and allocations will be announced in the immediate future. Further support for new equipment will be included in the 2000-01 budget.

- **Expand Telehealth Services**

Telehealth uses technology to help provide equitable access to health services to all parts of the province. In August/September 1999, 24 new Video Conference sites were installed across Alberta, bringing the total Telehealth sites to 51, located in 14 of the 17 regional health authorities. In 2000, it is expected that 20 additional Teleradiology sites will be installed early in the year and up to 20 more Video Conferencing sites before the end of the year.

This is probably the most outstanding initiative of its type anywhere, bringing psychiatry and diagnostic services to many parts of rural Alberta.

- **Launch the Pharmaceutical Information System**

alberta well/net is developing a secure Pharmaceutical Information Network to improve the quality of drug therapy received by Albertans. The network will connect doctors, pharmacists and other health professionals throughout Alberta.

In the coming year, the project will begin trials in a single pilot community. Lessons learned from the trial will prepare the project for full, province-wide implementation.

Providing comprehensive medication-related information, including a medication history to authorized health professionals, will improve patient care in two ways. It will provide Albertans with vastly improved, cost-effective drug therapy and it will help coordinate health service delivery across the province.

4. Increase Emphasis on Wellness Promotion, and Disease and Accident Prevention

- **Launch New Five-year Immunization Strategy**

Immunization programs are among the most cost-effective health interventions available and result in substantial savings to the health care system, as well as improved quality of life. During the next few years, a substantial number of new or improved vaccines are expected to be licensed in Canada that have the potential to prevent diseases, suffering, and death. A good example is the chicken pox vaccine that was licensed one year ago. Alberta is looking at a systematic introduction of these new vaccines through a new five-year Immunization Strategy, targeted primarily at children.

- **Implement New “Aging in Place” Strategy**

This strategy will provide supports to Albertans so that they can “age in place” and remain in the community for as long as possible.

The strategy will include two components:

- 1) Healthy aging initiatives where Alberta Health and Wellness will work with health authorities, professional associations, voluntary and community agencies to develop health promotion, prevention and empowerment programs and services for older Albertans.
- 2) The development of supportive housing spaces with appropriate care services over the next three years. A \$10 million allocation will help create new assisted living spaces in rural communities in partnership with the public and private sectors. A Health and Housing Partnership Committee, involving stakeholders and relevant government departments, will be formed to guide the planning in this area.

- **Implement New Provincial Breast Cancer Screening Plan**

In collaboration with the regional health authorities, the Alberta Cancer Board, physicians, and other stakeholders, an implementation plan is being developed that will enable women, aged 50-69, to access an integrated Provincial Breast Cancer Screening Program. The intent is to screen all women in their high-risk years to ensure early detection and treatment.

- **Develop Cervical Cancer Screening Program**

To detect cervical cancer in the early pre-cancerous stage, where this disease can be prevented or a cure is most likely, a cervical cancer screening program will be developed this year.

- **Implement New Province-Wide Metabolic Screening Program**

Between 20 - 30 babies are born in Alberta each year with “inborn errors of metabolism.” These inherited disorders, if untreated, rapidly lead to mental retardation and other health problems. Fortunately, if they are detected early, they can be prevented by simple measures like special diets or replacement of essential hormones (required for a lifetime). There is no way to tell which children are affected by looking at or examining them, but a simple blood test done in the first week of life can detect the conditions and treatment can be started before permanent damage is done. Alberta has recently introduced a new system which allows regional health authorities to register children immediately after birth and then ensure that the test is done and that any affected child receives treatment. This, combined with new standards for programs in the regions, should mean that every child is tested and treatment started when necessary so that no more babies are afflicted.

5. Foster New ideas to Improve Health Care

- **To help ensure the continued exploration for new ideas to protect and improve Alberta's health system and to provide arm's-length advice to government on health system reform, a special Premier's Advisory Council on Health is being established**

The Council will be made up of Canadians with both national and international reputations in health policy development and other fields of expertise. The Council will be chaired by Don Mazankowski, a former Member of Parliament for Vegreville for more than 25 years, and the former Deputy Prime Minister of Canada, federal Finance Minister, Transport Minister and Minister of Agriculture.

The Chair will, on behalf of Albertans, lead a dialogue with experts on the Council to identify the significant emerging health system issues, propose options to address those challenges for discussion with Albertans, and provide advice and comment on Alberta's progress with health system reform.

6. Protect the Publicly Funded and Administered Health System

- **Introduce legislation to protect Alberta's single-payer, publicly funded and administered health system**

On November 17, 1999, the Alberta Government released a Policy Statement on the Delivery of Surgical Services. The policy statement outlines the principles that will guide the development of health legislation planned for the spring 2000 session of the Alberta Legislature.

The legislation will protect the public health system by enshrining Alberta's commitment to a quality publicly funded and administered health system for the province and Alberta's commitment to the principles of the *Canada Health Act*. It would also give government the legislated authority to prohibit or regulate private surgical clinics.

The legislation will prohibit the development of any parallel two-tier health system in Alberta. At the same time, it would let publicly funded health authorities look for new and better ways to deliver health services, improve efficiency, and reduce waiting lists through limited contracts with surgical clinics to deliver some surgical services. The legislation would also ensure that no private surgical clinics operate outside of the public system.

The key principles of the legislation will be:

- Health funding will continue to go directly to publicly funded regional health authorities. It would be the health authority that would decide if there was a benefit to the public system to use some of their funding to contract with surgical clinics to do some procedures.
- Any contracts would need to demonstrate a net benefit to the public system, giving consideration to increased access to services, reduced waiting times, cost effectiveness, or efficiency.
- No Albertan would be required to pay for an insured service, and surgical clinics would be prohibited from charging patients extra for insured services.
- No person would be allowed to pay to receive faster service.

In summation, there are many challenges facing Canada's publicly funded and publicly administered health system. Through its record of innovation and reform, Alberta is well positioned to take the steps necessary to ensure access to quality health services when and where they are needed.

Through primary care experiments, new directions for long term care, increased focus on wellness promotion and disease prevention, alternative payment plans for physicians, teamwork and integration among health professions in the delivery of health services, and strengthened accountability, a new direction for the successful health system of the future is evolving.

This six-point plan takes Albertans' directions for the health system of the future and puts them into action.

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