



# Improving health care quality





**Quality health care is important to Albertans. We are fortunate to have a strong health care system that delivers safe and effective care to patients on a daily basis.**

Alberta Health and Wellness works closely with its partners in the health regions and health professions, as well as with many other stakeholders, to continually improve the quality of care and services provided to Albertans.

Alberta has developed a six-part quality framework to monitor and assess the quality of our health services. This framework will guide the search for new ways to improve the health care system.

## **Alberta's quality dimensions**

- Accessibility** Health services can be easily obtained in the most suitable setting in a reasonable time and distance.
- Acceptability** Health services are respectful and responsive to user needs, preferences and expectations.
- Appropriateness** Health services are relevant to user needs and are based on accepted or evidence-based practice.
- Effectiveness** Health services are provided based on scientific knowledge to achieve desired outcomes.
- Efficiency** Resources are optimally used in achieving desired outcomes.
- Safety** Risks are mitigated to avoid unintended or harmful results.



# Making quality count

Alberta Health and Wellness develops and reports on measures related to the quality of health services Albertans receive. The data are based on health outcomes and the overall satisfaction with health service.

These findings help health care professionals, administrators and the ministry to evaluate our health system

and plan innovative new ways to improve health services.

The Minister of Health and Wellness has a role in leading the health system to deliver high quality health services, to monitor performance and to report to Albertans. This report supports the minister's accountability for health system quality.

## Some indicators of quality

### Acceptability of health care services received

Albertans generally are satisfied with the health care services they receive with rates similar to the national average.

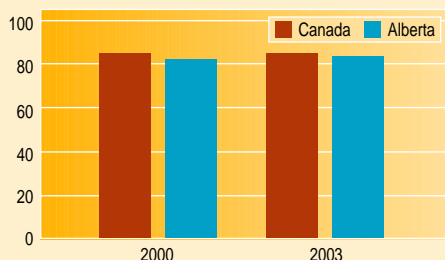
Individuals 15 years of age and over who received health care services over a 12-month period were asked to rate their satisfaction with the care they received.

In 2003, 84 per cent of patients were very or somewhat satisfied with health care services.

Seniors have even higher rates of satisfaction – 91 per cent of patients between the ages of 65 and 74 responded they were very or somewhat satisfied with health care services.

#### Patient Satisfaction with Health Care Services Received

(percentage reporting very or somewhat satisfied)



Source: Statistics Canada

### Satisfaction of hospital care received

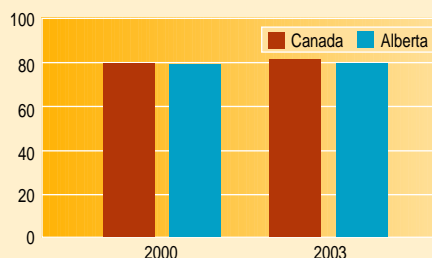
Albertans were satisfied with the quality of hospital care they received.

People also were asked to rate their satisfaction with hospital care they received – in 2003, 80 per cent of patients were very or somewhat satisfied, similar to the national average.

Seniors have high rates of satisfaction with the hospital services. Ninety per cent of patients between the ages of 65 and 74 were very or somewhat satisfied with the hospital care they received.

#### Patient Satisfaction with Hospital Care Services Received

(percentage reporting very or somewhat satisfied)



Source: Statistics Canada



## Health care effectiveness

Alberta is constantly working to make health care more effective. The positive results for patients who suffer a heart attack are one example of the effectiveness of our health services and programs.

Alberta has one of the lowest in-hospital mortality rates and hospital re-admission rates for patients following a heart attack. These rates can be attributed to the quality of first response care provided by emergency medical staff in the ambulance and hospital emergency care. This is followed by advanced diagnostic services and quality hospital care. As well, patients receive on-going follow-up care and rehabilitation from physicians, home care workers and other health professionals. These results indicate our health professionals and health system managers are providing highly effective care to Albertans.

## Access to prescription drugs

Access to health care services is more than visits to the doctor and traditional hospital services. Prescription drugs have become a major component of health care, and some treatments can be very expensive.

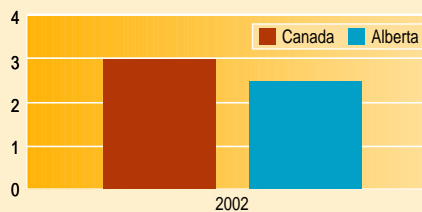
In 2002, Alberta households spent less on prescription drugs than most Canadians. Statistics Canada estimates that less than 2.5% per cent of Alberta

households spent more than 5 per cent of their income after taxes on prescription drugs.

The low spending rates could be due to the fact that Albertans are younger compared to the national average and enjoy one of the highest average household incomes. As well, 73 per cent of Albertans have insurance coverage for prescription drugs through either a public or private plan.

### 🔑 Spending on Prescription Drugs

(percentage of households spending over 5 per cent of income)

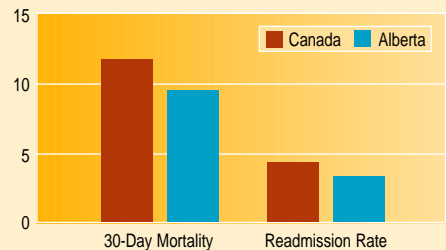


Source: Statistics Canada

E – Estimate has high variability – use with caution

### In-Hospital 30-Day Mortality Rate and Readmission to Hospital Following a Heart Attack

(percentage of the population)



Source: Canadian Institute for Health Information

### JOAN'S STORY

Joan is a single mother of three with an annual income of \$26,000. She is suffering from a sore throat and her physician prescribes a certain medication to treat the infection. Because Joan and her children qualify for a partial subsidy under the Alberta Blue Cross non-group plan, she pays reduced monthly premiums for drug coverage. When Joan goes to fill her prescription, she hands the pharmacist her Alberta Blue Cross card and is charged only 30 per cent of the cost of the prescription to a maximum of \$25.





## Patient safety

Patient safety is a fundamental part of quality health care. Errors can be reduced by establishing quality assurance processes that assess risk, monitor errors and mistakes, develop better ways to provide service, and improve communication on safe practices.

Alberta has established a number of initiatives to improve patient safety:

- Health regions participate in a patient safety accreditation process led by the Canadian Council on Health Services Accreditation.
- The College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta accredits facilities for safety.



- Health regions continue to develop regional policies to increase patient safety.
- Educational and professional development programs are offered to health care workers. These programs focus on safe and effective practices, management reviews, and a team approach to practice to reduce the human error.

## Partners in quality

High quality health care is accomplished through the shared daily responsibility of patients, health care providers, health regions, government and the public.

**Health professionals** provide treatment and also advice, care and education. They are strong advocates for patient interests. Health professionals must also meet practice and education requirements set out by their regulatory colleges and satisfy their employers about the quality of services they deliver.

The **Health Quality Council of Alberta**, established in February 2004, reports directly to Albertans on the quality and performance of health services. The council identifies best practices, and reviews and monitors health care quality issues including access and patient safety.

The council works closely with the Canadian Patient Safety Institute, and collaborates with other provincial bodies that address quality and patient safety.

In the fall of 2004, the Health Quality Council of Alberta will release the results of its latest public survey

about Albertans' satisfaction on how patient complaints are resolved and how well medical errors are being managed.

More information about the Health Quality Council of Alberta is available at: [www.hqca.ca](http://www.hqca.ca)

**Health authority boards** are responsible for hospitals, continuing care facilities, community health services and public health programs in Alberta. Health authorities allocate resources and co-ordinate and provide services to residents in their regions and to all Albertans.

Quality initiatives underway in the regions include:

- Establishing a clear process to address patient complaints or concerns.
- Continually working to improve patient safety and quality of care.
- Asking Albertans about the quality of services and care they receive.
- Working with the Health Quality Council of Alberta on its quality initiatives.

- Alberta supports the work of the Canadian Patient Safety Institute.

The **Canadian Patient Safety Institute** is a non-profit organization that provides leadership to improve patient safety and health care quality in Canada.

The institute promotes best practices and provides advice to governments, stakeholders and the public on strategies to improve patient safety. The institute works with national networks and experts and is supported by a secretariat located in Edmonton.

More information about the Canadian Patient Safety Institute is available at: [www.cpsi-icsp.ca](http://www.cpsi-icsp.ca)

The **Health Facilities Review Committee** monitors the quality of care, treatment and standards of accommodation provided to patients and residents in health care facilities. The committee inspects health facilities such as hospitals and nursing homes. It investigates complaints about the care and treatment of patients and the standards of accommodation.

More information about the Health Facilities Review Committee is available at: [www.health.gov.ab.ca/about/HFRC](http://www.health.gov.ab.ca/about/HFRC)





## Quality is everyone's business

In response to annual surveys, almost 80 per cent of Albertans say they have no complaints with the health services they received last year. Of those who expressed a concern, around 5 per cent reported their issues to someone, most frequently to their health service provider.

**Albertans can use the six dimensions of quality to identify the key questions to ask about health service quality:**

**Accessible:** Do I need a health service? Has my need for service been assessed fairly? Can I receive the needed service when I need it?

**Appropriate:** Is this the right service to meet my needs? Are there alternatives?

**Acceptable:** Am I being treated with respect and understanding? Is my health condition and treatment explained to me in ways I can understand?

**Efficient:** Is the health system making the best use of time and money?

**Effective:** Does the treatment or service improve or maintain my health?

**Safe:** Was I informed of the risks associated with the treatment? Did I feel safe?

Making the right decisions about health care is a shared responsibility among Albertans, health care providers and government.

### For more information:

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Access is available on-line at [www.health.gov.ab.ca](http://www.health.gov.ab.ca)



When you see a key it means that the information is a featured indicator based on a plan for reporting comparable health indicators developed by the Federal, Provincial and Territorial Ministers of Health. The Report of the Auditor General of Alberta on the featured indicators, and an appendix including methodology and technical information is available in the *Province of Alberta's 2004 Report on Comparable Health Indicators* at [www.health.gov.ab.ca/public/how\\_healthy.html](http://www.health.gov.ab.ca/public/how_healthy.html).

Complete results and technical information for all provinces and territories will be available after December 1, 2004 on the Canadian Institute for Health Information website at: [www.cihi.com](http://www.cihi.com)