



alberta party Health Policy Brief

This Alberta Party policy statement is the first in a series of policy briefs the Party is developing with the help of Albertans through our Big Listen process. The content reflects what we've heard at house meetings across the province and is built upon the policy directions adopted by our members. We want to ensure that our policies continue to reflect Albertans' priorities: please share your thoughts on this document by visiting our website at www.albertaparty.ca.

OUR VISION FOR A BETTER HEALTH SYSTEM

It comes as no surprise that Albertans rank health care as their number one priority. We need to know that when we get sick—or when our children, our parents, our loved ones get sick—our health care system will be there for us. The Alberta Party understands this need and has developed a vision for a better health care system for our province.

Publicly-funded, universal health care in Canada is an idea that was born on the Prairies, and the Alberta Party believes it can be perfected here. Albertans should have the best health care in the country, if not the world, and if we all pull together there is no question we can achieve this.

We envision a health system in which:

- Every Albertan has a family doctor
- People can easily and seamlessly access the help they need, whether it be primary, emergency, acute, home, long-term or palliative care
- Our seniors are healthy for as long as possible, and are provided the support they need to remain in their own homes and communities
- Patients can come home to their families from the hospital sooner because there are medical professionals able to support them there
- No person or family struggling with mental health issues or addiction is turned away when they reach out for help
- Everyone takes responsibility for their health, and healthy choices are encouraged, supported and made easier by the communities around us
- Healthcare staff are proud of the work they do and feel confident they are providing timely access to the highest quality and safest health care in Canada

- Every community has a say in how their health care is provided, and important decisions are made at the local level
- Tax dollars are spent wisely, and additional investment is financially responsible and always leads to better outcomes
- Every Albertan can rest assured that the high quality care we're provided is sustainable, and will be there when our children and grandchildren need it

While these hopes were expressed by Big Listen participants province-wide, they were also accompanied by a growing sense that our health care is moving in the wrong direction. Spiraling costs, growing wait times, the hasty creation of a health superboard, and concerns about the silencing of doctors advocating for their patients were all identified as symptoms of a system in decline. Given the realities of an aging population and increasing chronic illness, can we really continue to manage health care this way?

Alberta spends more on health care than any other province in Canada, yet has longer wait times and poorer outcomes than other provinces in most areas of the system. Our per capita health spending has doubled since 2000, but Albertans actually have a harder time finding a family doctor than they did back then. New spending announcements seem to be off-the-cuff or reactionary, rather than made according to a plan – health facilities are being built without staff in place to run them.

Throwing more money at the problem is not a solution; we need to better manage the resources already there.

4 PRIORITIES

These challenges may seem discouraging, but the good news is there are simple, achievable steps we can take to start building a better health system. It starts with clearly identifying our priorities.

To achieve our vision for a better health system for Albertans, an Alberta Party government would prioritize four different areas for action:

1. HOME CARE AND LONG TERM CARE

The Alberta Party will invest in expanding access to high-quality home care and continuing care.

Acute care beds in hospitals are very expensive (up to \$3000 per bed per day), yet many patients in these beds are only there because they're waiting for beds in other parts of the system (eg. long-term care or palliative care), and they're waiting a long time. Many could even be cared for at home, if we had better support systems in place for their families. Increasing support for home care and continuing care is better for Albertans. It gives seniors and their families more of a say over their living arrangements and is much less expensive for our health system.

2. FAMILY DOCTORS AND PRIMARY CARE

The Alberta Party will work to ensure that everyone has a family doctor and is able to easily access a primary care network.

When people can easily see their primary health providers (family doctors, nurse practitioners, and other health professionals), they can identify and treat problems before they become worse, minimizing recovery times and preventing the system from having to provide more expensive levels of care. The Alberta Party will review and expand the primary health network model and increase the num-

ber of practitioners. We would also establish better connections between these networks and local communities, to ensure that primary care reflects the specific needs of the community where it's being delivered.

3. PREVENTION OF ILLNESS AND INJURY

The Alberta Party will implement initiatives that prevent people from becoming sick or injured in the first place.

Chronic illness is the most common form of illness and is very expensive to treat. Injuries are a leading cause of hospitalization among Albertans and often require expensive treatment and rehabilitation. However, many injuries and chronic illnesses are largely preventable. Simple and relatively inexpensive initiatives – like improving the enforcement of workplace safety standards – can go a long way towards reducing the frequency of injuries and illness, and lessening their human and financial burdens. The Alberta Party will also create a school health policy that integrates nutrition and healthy living into Alberta's education curriculum.

4. MENTAL HEALTH & ADDICTION

The Alberta Party will create a mental health strategy for the province and expand access to treatment for addiction.

Mental illness and substance abuse have devastating impacts on individuals, our families and on our communities. Pretending there isn't a problem is no longer an option. Families struggling with these types of illnesses need to know that help is there for them when they need it, and before their situation gets worse. An Alberta Party government would develop a province-wide mental health strategy that treats mental health in the same way we address physical health.

STABILITY AND SOUND MANAGEMENT

The Alberta Party will bring the people who deliver our health care, and those who receive it, back into decision-making processes. Health care in Alberta has suffered over the past decade because we accepted that increased spending and massive reorganizations were the only solutions. This is not the case. The Alberta Party believes doctors, nurses and health professionals are in the best position to fix the health care system, but they need to be able to act when they see problems. An Alberta Party Government will improve management of our health system by empowering doctors, nurses and health care providers to plan and implement health delivery at the local level. We will increase transparency and accountability of the health care system by appointing an independent Health Auditor who will report directly to the public and will be independent from government, similar to the independence of the federal Auditor General.

Although some components of our health system (such as purchasing) are best managed centrally, the creation of the health superboard moved decision making too far away from local health care providers. The health care needs in Calgary could be very different from the needs in Bonneyville. The superboard has stifled innovation, and made it difficult for local health care practitioners to make decisions. This needs to change—but immediately

eliminating the superboard is not the answer. We need to ensure that further restructuring is well thought-out. An Alberta Party government would allow our health care system time to regain stability before implementing another major restructuring. We would use the intervening period to get to work on the priorities outlined in this document and to involve administrators, providers, and citizens in a discussion of how best to structure the governance of our health care system.

CONCLUSION

Health care is a complex but fundamental issue to every society. It's a reflection of our nature, our values, and our unique culture. We can learn from others, but we can't simply import solutions from elsewhere and expect the same results here. Only we can fix our problems. Only we can turn our vision into a reality. The Alberta Party invites all Albertans to join us in creating new solutions to improving the accessibility, delivery, and sustainability of our health care system. If we all pull together, there's no limit to what we can achieve.

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common ground. common sense.

