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## Manitoba Health Coalition takes off amidst province's health-system transformation program

NEWS | TESSIE SANCI

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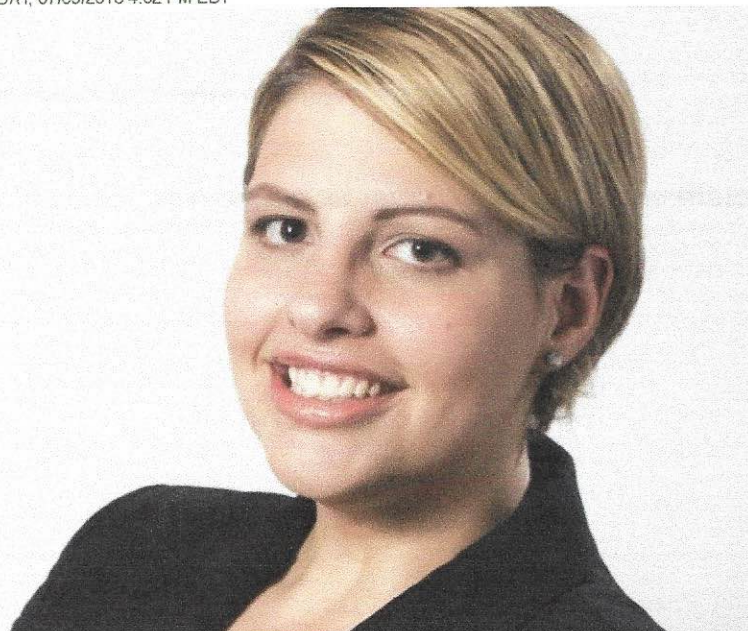


Photo courtesy of Brianne Goertzen  
Brianne Goertzen is the first provincial director for the Manitoba Health Coalition, which launched at the end of June.

A recent meeting of health ministers was not the only noteworthy health discussion occurring in Winnipeg in late June. The city also served as the launch pad for the **Manitoba Health Coalition (MHC)**, which advocates for the delivery of publicly-funded health care.

Introducing the coalition to Manitobans while provincial, territorial and federal health ministers were in town was "good timing to ensure that people are aware that, yes, there is the government side of health care, but there is also a public non-partisan advocacy group that is also on their side who is going to be fighting for ... health care for all," said **Brianne Goertzen**, provincial director of the MHC.

The MHC is the newest member of the Canadian Health Coalition (CHC) family. With this addition, the federal organization, formerly a registered federal lobbying organization, has completed its provincial network of branches. (CHC networks are found across the country with the exception of the Yukon and Nunavut.)

Like its federal parent, the MHC plans on pushing to keep health care services in the public realm, and there are specific changes occurring in Manitoban health care that requires the existence of this organization at a more local level, according to Goertzen.

"We're just starting to see a bit of an erosion of the public health care system in the province and I think that it's pertinent for us to ensure that we're always defending and ensuring that all Manitobans have access to universal, public health care as opposed to a slow erosion towards privatization and a two-tier health system," she said.

The province is undergoing what Manitoba's Health minister, **Kelvin Goertzen** (who is no relation to Brianne Goertzen) has called a "health system transformation." The province is looking to decrease health spending, with the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, one public health service provider, asked by the province for cuts of \$83 million from its 2017-2018

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budget.

Some of the decisions that have been made include the complete closing of one hospital emergency room and the conversion of two other emergency rooms into urgent care centres. These are all located in Winnipeg. In addition, adult physiotherapy and occupational therapy services are being moved out of hospitals (with some exceptions) and patients are expected to pay for [private practitioners](#).

Brianne Goertzen's first campaign will be to spread the word about the coalition and its mandate.

"Since it's a new coalition, the big initiative is to obviously build awareness that the coalition exists, to start the educational pieces that are necessary in order to build a movement around health care in the province," Goertzen explained. "Social change takes time and pushing for issues such as public, universal health care are ones that necessitate ensuring you have a lot of people on board and you have public support."

Goertzen anticipates her awareness campaign will include the use of traditional public relations tools such as media interviews and press releases as well as the use of newer resources like social media. She will also be attending community events to speak to Manitobans about their concerns with health care in the province.

"It's really about me getting out in the community, talking to people, not just government stakeholders," Goertzen said. "I want to hear what they say is working for them, what's not working for them in health care and actually having a true meaningful consultation with people from across the province."

Whether Goertzen becomes a registered lobbyist on Manitoba's compulsory registry, or Winnipeg's voluntary one, remains to be seen. That conversation has not yet been had with the interim board of directors, she said.

Once the MHC has a higher profile, then the health care campaigns can begin, with the help of postcard distribution, information sessions and public town halls to build support amongst community members.

"Time is something that a lot of people are short on, so ensuring that we have a variety of entry points for people to participate and to also get their voices heard on health care is what my goal is at the end of the day," Goertzen said.

Building public support for a cause is Goertzen's specialty. Before she was director of the MHC, Goertzen was an organizer for the Manitoba arm of the **Canadian Federation of Students**, where she was responsible for increasing awareness of its cause and bringing people together to produce collective action in support of that cause.

Her advocacy of public education also extends to her running to be a school trustee in her community, a race that she won in 2016, and a job that she continues to hold.

Goertzen was also a candidate in the 2015 federal election on the NDP ticket. She told the [Winnipeg Free Press](#) at the time that, if elected, she would work to improve health care and child care. Although she was once affiliated with the federal NDP, Goertzen stressed in her interview with The Lobby Monitor that the MHC is a non-partisan organization.

Her advocacy in the areas of health and education are an extension of her own experiences growing up.

"As long as I can remember, I have always been a person who was fighting for people like myself, who come from a lower socioeconomic status, and it has grown from there," Goertzen said. "I think that everybody should have a fair chance in life, especially when we're talking about health care or we're talking about education. We're supposed to be a country that provides equal opportunity to folks. However, that is just not the case."

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