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Stereotype of NDP governments as big spenders on health care not supported by historical data

EDMONTON—A new report released today by the University of Alberta’s Parkland Institute finds that contrary to the enduring political stereotype, New Democratic Party (NDP) governments in Canada—including Alberta’s current government—have not been overly profligate spenders on health care.

Alberta in Context: Health Care Under NDP Governments analyzes and compares the historical record of NDP governments on health care in the five provinces where they had formed government prior to 2015: Ontario, British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Nova Scotia, with a specific focus on health care funding, hospitals, staffing levels, and labour relations. The report also examines briefly the health care policies of the Alberta NDP government since 2015, highlighting points of intersection and contrast with the five provinces examined.

“On balance we found that while NDP governments have tended to spend more on health care as a percentage of provincial GDP compared to non-NDP governments, the data simply don’t support the myth of NDP governments breaking the bank on health care,” says report co-author Trevor Harrison. “When compared to Liberal and Conservative governments, provincial NDP administrations since the 1990s have largely approached health care spending with an emphasis on fiscal prudence.”

Likewise, Harrison says, public spending as a percentage of overall health spending has also tended to increase under NDP governments, but there is little evidence pointing to a significant change in the public-to-private spending ratio under NDP governments.

“Perhaps due to the precarious financial situations many of them faced when elected—and to the chagrin of many of the party’s base supporters—NDP governments have largely been content to hold the line on health care, rather than introduce sweeping changes,” Harrison says.

“Perhaps of particular interest in Alberta today, we found that second-term NDP governments have historically tended to focus and spend more on health care than they did in the first term, and health care spending by incoming governments after the end of an NDP mandate tended to decrease or stagnate.”

Parkland Institute is a non-partisan public policy research institute in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Alberta. *Alberta in Context: Health Care Under NDP Governments* is available for [download on Parkland Institute’s website](#).

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