

Alberta's Opportunity

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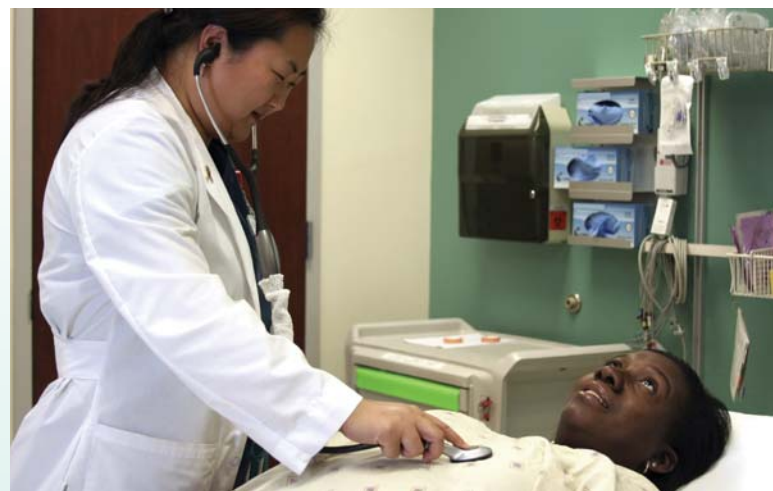
POLICIES TO SPEED UP ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

We have the opportunity to create an amazing health care system in Alberta, with world-class health care professionals, modern equipment, excellent hospitals...and perhaps most importantly, quick access to care for all Albertans.

Even with the best doctors, equipment, technology and research in the world, our health care system falls short if Albertans can't access it in a timely manner. The health care needs of Albertans have outpaced the system's ability to serve those needs, leading to dangerously long wait times.

Alberta faces an immediate shortage of 4000 health professionals, including 1000 physicians.

- Staff shortages are forcing hospitals throughout Alberta to temporarily close their intensive care and other units.
- Patients often suffer for months on surgical wait lists.
- Hospitals are grappling with ongoing emergency room overcrowding.
- Roughly one in five Albertans don't have family physicians.



When people can't get access to health care, they suffer. And so does the province's quality of life and economy. It's an unsustainable situation that must be solved.

Accelerated Access for All

Whether you live in a large city, a small town or on the farm, all Albertans deserve quick access to health care. See below for policies that will give rural Albertans better access to health care services — policies such as our pledge to build a new continuing care centre in Fort McMurray, to fund the Peace Country Regional Health Centre and to create patient-centred transportation systems for those who have difficulty reaching a health care provider.



Policies to Speed Up Access to Health Care...cont'd

Some have suggested that wait time guarantees will solve the problem. Unfortunately, wait time guarantees just shuffle patients to other jurisdictions or expensive private clinics, and they take money out of the public system.

Improving access within the public system is the prudent, affordable, sustainable, patient-friendly approach. An Alberta Liberal government will use better planning, better management and targeted spending to make our public health care system more efficient, more effective, and more accessible.

An Alberta Liberal government will provide:

- action to tackle both immediate and long-term staff shortages
- strategies to reduce emergency room overcrowding
- a greater number of specialized surgical centres within the public system
- stable funding and long-term planning for mental health services
- creative alternatives to the fee-for-service payment model
- innovation to build healthier communities

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Build and Stabilize the Health Workforce

There simply aren't enough doctors, nurses and allied health professionals to go around. Existing health care professionals face staggering workloads and on-the-job burnout. We need to find more workers in the short term, and to take strong action to encourage more young people to choose health care as a career. And we need to improve job satisfaction and the work environment for our current health care workforce — both to encourage them to continue practicing in Alberta, and because it's the right thing to do.

- Increase spaces in post-secondary institutions for the entire range of health care professionals.
- Offer comprehensive incentives to attract and retain rural and family physicians.
- More residencies and training for international medical graduates, including approximately 200 already in Alberta.
- Support employers to develop and implement creative retention programs.
- Promote health care as a viable career option for high school students.

Encourage Healthy Communities

The best way to increase the availability of health services is to reduce the number of people who need them.

- Open more Community Health Centres, to provide convenient, efficient, flexible access to physicians.
- Design education programs to reduce workplace injuries, motor vehicle collisions, children's injuries, and domestic abuse.
- Extend the delivery of high-quality, cost-effective home care.
- Design a coordinated, patient-centred transportation system for patients who need assistance to visit a clinic or health care professional.



Provide Better Care for the Mentally Ill

Each year, about 17 percent of Albertans rely on mental health services. Untreated or under-treated mental illness exacts a social and economic toll on individuals, friends, families and entire communities.

- Restore stable funding and long-term planning to mental health.
- Provide a community-based system of treatment and support.
- Renew emphasis on income and employment support, housing, and crisis response.

Explore Alternate Payment Models

Most doctors are paid by fee-for-service. That is, they bill a specific amount for each procedure they complete, regardless of how long the job takes. For many doctors, there may be better alternatives. Making these alternatives available to doctors could lead to increased job satisfaction, better value for money, and improved patient results.

Actively encourage physicians to participate in Alternate Relationship Plans.

Support Specialized Surgical Centres

Specialized clinics can deliver superior quality treatment with reduced administrative costs. The Alberta Bone and Joint Institute's recent Hip and Knee Replacement Pilot Project successfully reduced surgery wait times by 90 percent and consultation wait times by 80 percent.

Promote the opening of specialized surgical centres within the public system.

Build Capacity and Ease E.R. overcrowding

Patients often spend time in emergency rooms after they have been admitted, because all of the hospital's other beds are already full. This contributes to emergency room overcrowding and long wait times.

- Introduce Bed Management Coordinators into three of Alberta's busiest hospitals, for a one-year pilot project.
- Immediately increase the number of available long-term care beds, to reduce the number of long-term care patients occupying hospital beds.
- Fund construction of a new continuing care facility in Fort McMurray to take pressure off the hospital.
- Fund the development of the 300-acute-care-bed Peace Country Regional Health Centre, and redevelop the QEII Hospital into a Community Health Centre.

We Can Do Better

Two decades' worth of arbitrary cutbacks, poor planning and creeping privatization have eroded our public health care system. With our current climate of rapid population growth and rampant labour shortages, the system is under more pressure than ever. There's a desperate need for vision and innovation to revitalize health care in Alberta.

The Alberta Liberal Caucus has spent years developing that vision. We have consulted widely with ordinary citizens and health professionals. We've studied innovative projects in Alberta and elsewhere. The solutions we're proposing have been proven to work; they simply need to be implemented.

Alberta should have the finest public health care system in the world. With the expertise of our health professionals and the resources we have at our disposal, there's no reason to settle for anything less.