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Moving ahead with better health care

Third Way provides more choice and improved access

Calgary... Albertans will soon have a much wider variety of health care options to choose from as the province embarks on its Third Way of health care delivery, as promised by Premier Ralph Klein earlier this year.

Policy and regulatory changes will pave the way for innovations in Third Way priority areas of access, continuing care, wellness, mental health, primary health care, children's health, pharmaceuticals, electronic health records, and rural health.

"It's time to move from ideas to action. It's time to offer people choice. It's time to take the shackles off the health authorities, open up the system, and see what works and what doesn't," said Premier Ralph Klein.

This made-in-Alberta approach to health care renewal is about unleashing innovation, challenging the status quo and charting a new course. This is the first step toward making the best health care system in Canada among the best in the world.

At Alberta's Symposium on Health hosted by the province in May, over 400 participants and

28 experts from around the world said that innovative health care systems must rely on evidence-based innovation. Today's announcement represents a fulfillment of that commitment.

"Since May I've travelled across the province and asked Albertans what they want for health care. Their responses have been consistent. Albertans want assurances they will continue to receive public health care, and they want better access and more choice," said Alberta Health and Wellness Minister Iris Evans. "Our approach will complement the public system with a plan that provides for enhanced or optional health services for those who both want it and can afford it. No Albertan will be denied access to basic health services because they cannot afford it."

Third Way plans for 2005 and 2006 include:

- Changing regulations to provide choice in hospital rooms and enhanced medical goods and services.
- Developing a Health Care Assurance Act for Albertans.
- Taking serious action on wellness.
- Making children's health a top priority.
- Improving access to mental health services.
- Implementing an Electronic Health Record for all Albertans.
- Expanding primary health care services.
- Improving access.
- Controlling spiraling drug costs.
- Improving the long term care system.

- Increasing the number of health care providers.
- Improving health services in rural communities.

"Our Third Way is about evolution, not revolution," said Evans. "It's about getting on with providing Albertans with better health care."

The public is encouraged to provide input about the Third Way on the Alberta Health and Wellness website at www.health.gov.ab.ca.

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The document containing detailed proposed changes can be viewed at <http://www.health.gov.ab.ca/Key/reform/getting.html>.

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