

April 16, 2008

Government launches aggressive action plan to make public health system more efficient and ensure equitable access to services

New model for health authority governance within two months

Edmonton ... The Alberta government will take action on a wide range of initiatives aimed at system reform to improve access to health services and make the province's health care system more efficient and effective.

The plan identifies initiatives to improve health system governance and accountability, expand health workforce recruitment, manage health services to better meet patient needs, promote healthy and safe communities and introduce new technologies for Albertans to access and understand the health system over the next nine months.

"Alberta has a good public health system that needs to be made more accessible," said Ron Liepert, Minister of Health and Wellness. "We've set out an ambitious plan to make the necessary decisions and changes to build a better health care system that will be there for people when they need it."

By June 15, a decision will be made on a new governance model for regional health authorities and health boards. A decision will also be made on managing ground emergency medical services in the province.

"Our top priority is to improve accessibility and the future sustainability of the health system," said Liepert. "Our new direction will build on the Mazankowski report in 2001 and all other reports and studies done by government. Also important to the work we do is building on policies from the 2006 *Health Policy Framework – Getting on with Better Health Care*. The outcome of the plan is a sustainable, effective and efficient health system that provides quality patient-focused care to Albertans."

The plan calls for immediate actions in the following areas:

- Mandatory accreditation and reporting for all Alberta health service providers and facilities.
- Monitoring for compliance with province-wide infection prevention and control standards.
- Address workforce-related issues and support for continuing care.
- Expand educational spaces for physicians, registered nurses and laboratory and respiratory therapists.
- Develop a patient navigator system to improve access to health services and continuity of care.
- Expand the role of pharmacists in preventing and managing chronic diseases.
- Expand addiction and mental health services.
- Expand initiatives to promote healthy lifestyles and prevent disease.

"We have spent a lot of time talking about the issues facing the system, performing studies and analyzing options for change," said Liepert. "Now it's time to make those tough decisions and implement the strategies that will result in a better health care system for Albertans. We have a lot of hard work ahead of us but our goal of developing a health system to meet our needs a decade from now

is achievable.”

Specific action plan initiatives will be announced over the next three months (on or before June 15), six months (on or before Sept. 15) and nine months (on or before Dec. 15). Funding and legislative changes for action plan initiatives will be outlined in the 2009/10 provincial budget and the 2009 spring session of the Alberta Legislative Assembly.

Backgrounders on timelines and current initiatives attached.

-30-

Media enquiries north of Red Deer may be directed to:

Shannon Haggarty, Communications, Alberta Health and Wellness, 780-427-7164, or

Media enquiries in Red Deer and south may be directed to:

Howard May, Communications, Alberta Health and Wellness, 403-949-5011

To call toll free within Alberta dial 310-0000.

April 16, 2008

Health Action Plan

The following initiatives have been identified for immediate action.

Governance and Accountability

- All regional health authorities, hospitals, nursing homes and community health programs to obtain and maintain accreditation status from appropriate accrediting bodies, such as the Canadian Council on Health Services Accreditation and the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta, and provide those reports to Alberta Health and Wellness.
- Monitor and report on compliance with province-wide infection prevention and control standards.
- Monitor compliance with continuing care health service standards.

Health Workforce

- Address workforce-related issues and support for continuing care.
- Work with Alberta Advanced Education and Technology to create new education seats for physicians, registered nurses, licensed practical nurses and other health professionals.
- Employment and Immigration is opening Health Career Centres in Edmonton and Calgary. These centres will support the efforts of the attraction plan being worked on by Health and Wellness and Employment and Immigration for both internationally educated health care professionals and Albertans wishing to choose a health care career in Alberta.
- Health and Wellness, working with Education and Advanced Education and Technology, will develop a plan to promote health careers for high school students. Career and Technology Studies health care pathways, beginning in 2010, will provide opportunities for high school students to work toward post-secondary certifications in health occupations.

Improving Access

- Implement ways to improve rural health services with a Virtual Campus and Rural Mentoring program which will promote more educational opportunities in rural areas and encourage more graduates to choose rural practice.
- Implement a patient navigator system to help patients with complex health needs navigate the health system and access the right services at the right time. McMaster University is developing a training program for the department to support regional health care workers in implementing this system.
- Continue to expand the role of pharmacists in preventing disease and managing chronic diseases, particularly in rural communities.

Healthy and Safe Communities

- Dr. Raj Sherman, Parliamentary Assistant for Alberta Health and Wellness, will lead strategies to promote healthy living including nutrition guidelines and the provincial Create A Movement campaign, disease prevention and safe communities.

Three-month action items

Details on these initiatives will be announced on or before June 15.

Governance and Accountability

- Establish a new health system governance model with a focus on accountability, performance measures and capital planning.
- Perform regular service delivery reviews to increase efficiency and improve capital planning.
- Announce a governance and funding model for ground emergency medical services.
- Develop a plan to register all Albertans in the Alberta Health Care Insurance Plan to coincide with the plan to eliminate health care premiums.

Health Workforce

- Implement a virtual campus and rural mentoring for medical students, including support for third-year medical students to complete eight-month rotations in rural Alberta.
- Announce additional seats for respiratory therapists and medical laboratory technologists.
- Implement actions that will improve Alberta's ability to recruit more foreign-trained health professionals as well as work with other provinces on a recruitment strategy for western Canada.

Improving Access

- Improve co-ordination of cancer services with other acute and community care services, and improve access to cancer services including looking at ways to provide chemotherapy at home. The Cancer Radiation Therapy Corridor (Lethbridge, Red Deer, Grande Prairie) will improve access to radiation treatment.
- Set targets to improve access to primary health care.
- Expand facility space and community care services for seniors.

Sustainability

- Establish a bulk-buy policy for equipment, drugs and supplies to be implemented province-wide and develop a strategy for all western provinces.

Healthy and Safe Communities

- Support good nutrition and being active by releasing new nutrition guidelines for children and youth and launching a new phase of the Create A Movement campaign, (www.createamovement.ca).
- Support infection prevention and control by implementing a blood-borne pathogen strategy.
- Expand cancer screening and awareness programs.
- Launch the Children's Mental Health Plan.

Six-month action items

Details on these initiatives will be announced on or before Sept. 15.

Governance and Accountability

- Report on the implementation progress of the new provincial governance model.

Health Workforce

- Develop a policy and initiate action to introduce and support the role of physician assistants in the health care system.

Improving Access

- Implement a new Alberta pharmaceutical strategy to address the cost of pharmaceuticals and support the effective use of drugs. This will include collaboration with other government ministries.
- Develop a new continuing care services strategy to address the needs of an aging population and provide more options for home care and community care.
- Develop home telehealth pilot projects to help patients manage their chronic diseases.
- Announce the plan to develop a provincial patient portal to allow Albertans to access their health

- information online.
- Develop a provincial health services strategy to increase capacity to admit emergency department and elective surgery patients to existing beds, improve access to primary care and improve overall health system efficiency.
- Pursue co-ordinated access to centres of specialization in Alberta, British Columbia and Saskatchewan.

Healthy and Safe Communities

- Expand beds for addictions treatment and mental health services.
- Support nutrition and physical activities by implementing the Healthy Kids Alberta strategy.
- Implement public posting of restaurant inspections.
- Proclaim the *Mental Health Amendment Act* and consult on regulations to ensure those requiring treatment receive it.
- Work with Alberta industries to address the stigma of mental health illness in the workplace.

Nine-month action items

Details on these initiatives will be announced on or before Dec. 15.

Governance and Accountability

- Develop and deliver provincial health services model to make them more efficient and effective.

Health Workforce

- Implement plan to increase rural residencies for international medical graduates.
- Implement technologies to reduce health workforce injuries and increase efficiency.
- Align training and curriculum for nursing to meet health system needs.

Improving Access

- Introduce strategies that will result in greater adoption and use of the provincial electronic health record system and expand access to all core health care providers.
- Establish a plan for improved access to ambulatory, urgent, continuing and acute care.

Sustainability

- Table a long-term health system sustainability plan.
- Develop a plan to adopt new technologies and therapeutics.

Healthy and Safe Communities

- Launch a new “Framework for a Healthy Alberta” that sets targets to reduce disease and injury rates.
- Extend the ban of trans fats in restaurants and eliminate junk food in schools.
- Extend influenza vaccine coverage.

-30-

Media enquiries north of Red Deer may be directed to:

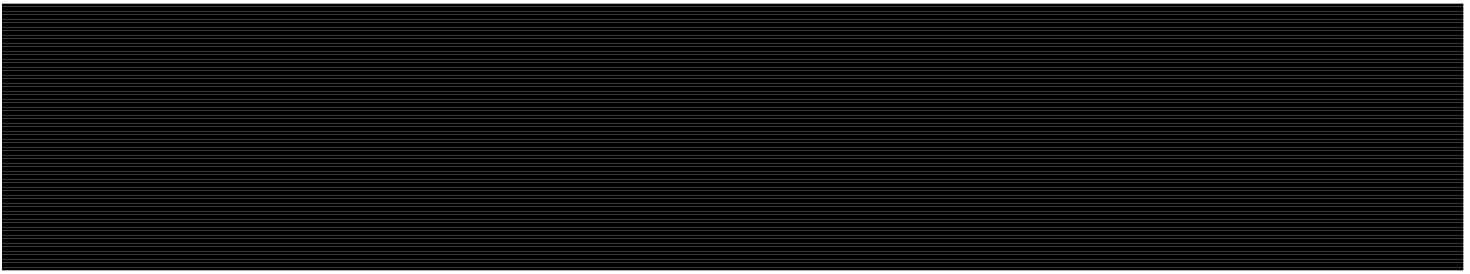
Shannon Haggarty, Communications, Alberta Health and Wellness, 780-427-7164

or

Media enquiries in Red Deer and south may be directed to:

Howard May, Communications, Alberta Health and Wellness, 403-949-5011

To call toll free within Alberta dial 310-0000.



April 16, 2008

Key health initiatives

The health action plan builds on major initiatives undertaken by Alberta Health and Wellness. These initiatives include:

Expanded cancer screening programs

Programs to screen for cervical, breast and colorectal cancer will be implemented province-wide in 2008.

The cervical cancer screening program, which began in the Calgary area in fall 2003 and the Palliser Health Region in spring 2004, will be expanded province-wide this spring. A provincial breast cancer screening program that targets women 50 to 69 years of age will also be implemented this year. An annual colorectal cancer screening for men and women age 50 to 74 will be introduced this year.

Electronic Health Record/Alberta Netcare

Alberta is leading Canada in the successful implementation of a single, province-wide Electronic Health Record, also known as Alberta Netcare.

Alberta Netcare is an important tool for physicians, pharmacists and other health service providers in Alberta. It improves patient care by providing up-to-date available information immediately at the point of care, reduces unnecessary duplication of tests and makes basic patient information available to health service providers and supports better care decisions and improves patient safety.

More than 24,000 physicians, pharmacists and other health service providers are registered users of Alberta Netcare.

Telehealth

In November 2007, the Alberta government provided more than \$2.4 million to the Telehealth Clinical Grant Program to give Albertans living in rural and remote areas better access to health care services without having to travel great distances.

Telehealth uses videoconferencing technology to connect Albertans with the best possible health care, no matter where they live. It connects patients and health care providers securely and confidentially by carrying pictures, voices and information so that effective decisions about health care can be made.

This technology is interactive and allows participants to talk with health professionals who are located in another community and may reduce the need to travel for consultation, treatment or follow-up.

Alberta's telehealth network is one of the largest in Canada with more than 500 telehealth sites across the province.

Health Workforce Action Plan

Alberta's Health Workforce Action Plan, announced in September 2007, is a collaborative effort between Health and Wellness, Employment and Immigration, and Advanced Education and

Technology. The nine-year plan promotes systemic change in Alberta's health system and supports the health sector by addressing immediate and future health workforce needs through initiatives such as programs to assess more internationally educated registered nurses, adding more health care professionals in rural Alberta, increasing post-secondary spaces for students in health programs, enhancing professional development bursaries, and increased recruitment efforts to raise the number of registered nurses working in Alberta.

Rural Physician Action Plan

The Alberta Rural Physician Action Plan, established in 1991, is an initiative funded by Alberta Health and Wellness that provides a provincially-focused comprehensive, integrated and sustained program for the education, recruitment and retention of Alberta physicians in rural practice. The initiatives under the plan aim at improving the quality of rural health care by offering comprehensive and integrated initiatives for medical students, residents, practising physicians and regional health authorities.

Create a Movement

Create A Movement was launched in September 2007 to encourage young people and their parents to eat healthy and be more active to reduce their risk of obesity and chronic disease. This public awareness campaign urges Albertans to put their knowledge into action - to eat smart and move more and enjoy the benefits of better health. The campaign includes television, radio, public transit, print and cinema advertisements and a website directed at young people and parents.

More funding for continuing care

In January 2008, Premier Stelmach announced \$300 million in funding for seven new long-term care facilities and 600 new and 200 replacement long-term care beds. This funding responds to the pressing need for more long-term care beds, largely the result of the province's growing population. Adding long-term care beds will also ease pressures on Alberta's hospitals by enabling these individuals to be more appropriately placed in a long-term care facility and as quickly as possible.

Strong and Vibrant Communities

The Minister of Health and Wellness is mandated to work with the Minister of Justice to promote strong and vibrant communities and reduce crime so Albertans feel safe. As part of this mandate, the Health and Wellness Minister will lead an initiative to increase the number of treatment beds for drug addictions and mental health services. AADAC, a Crown agency of the Alberta government, mandated by the *Alcohol and Drug Abuse Act*, will lead the expansion of beds and addictions services.

Mental Health

Regulations are being developed under the *Mental Health Amendment Act* to allow for the implementation of Community Treatment Orders. A Community Treatment Order is a tool intended to improve patients' compliance with treatment while residing in the community, thus reducing the need for recurring re-admission to mental health facilities

Alberta's Immunization Strategy

In February 2007, the Alberta government distributed \$8 million over two years to the province's nine health regions, in an effort to increase immunization rates. Alberta has one of the most comprehensive publicly-funded immunization programs in Canada. The strategy contains a 10-year plan to minimize the risk of vaccine-preventable diseases by increasing immunization rates.

Primary Care

Through Primary Care Networks, 1.7 million Albertans have access to primary care services provided by more than 1,480 physicians working with other health care providers such as dietitians, social workers, nurses and pharmacists. Alberta currently has 26 Primary Care Networks, with others coming online within the next year.

Infection Prevention and Control Strategy

After infection prevention and control issues were identified in Vegreville in March 2007, the Alberta government introduced the Alberta Infection Prevention and Control Strategy, and the first provincial

infection prevention and control standards.

The province is working with the health regions and health profession regulatory bodies on the implementation of the standards, and monitoring for compliance.

Alberta's Health System Governance

1994 – To Date

Prior to 1994

- The role of the provincial health ministry was a paternalistic “hands on” management style towards numerous boards responsible for delivery of health care services. There were 128 acute care hospital boards, 25 public health boards and 40 long-term care boards. Health services were poorly co-ordinated and fragmented.

1994

- Regional health authorities were established as part of government's efforts to reduce the size of government and delegate operational decision making to the local level. Alberta was divided into 17 health regions each with its own board appointed by government.

2001

- As part of municipal elections on Oct. 15, 2001 two-thirds of board members were elected and the remaining one-third were appointed on Nov. 9, 2001. Fully appointed Boards were re-established due to limited interest and lack of voter turnout.

2003

- Dec. 19, 2002 - The 17 health regions were consolidated to nine regions with the new boundaries effective April 1, 2003.
- April 2003 – mental health services and associated budgets transferred to regional health authorities. Alberta Mental Health Board continues to provide policy and planning advice to the health minister.

-30-

For media inquiries north of Red Deer may be directed to:

Shannon Haggarty, Communications, Alberta Health and Wellness, 780-427-7164

or

For media inquiries in Red Deer and south may be directed to:

Howard May, Communications, Alberta Health and Wellness, 403-949-5011

To call toll free within Alberta dial 310-0000.

[Alberta Government](#) | [Ministries Listing](#) | [Health and Wellness Home Page](#) | [News Releases](#) | [Top of Page](#) |

[Send us your comments or questions](#)

Copyright(©) 2008 Government of Alberta