November 30, 2010

5-year Health Action Plan sets clear course for health system

Edmonton... Reduced wait times for surgeries, quicker access to cancer treatment and more continuing care options are some of the improvements Albertans can expect as part of a new health action plan released by the Government of Alberta and Alberta Health Services (AHS).

Becoming the Best: Alberta’s 5-year Health Action Plan provides Albertans clear direction on what they can expect from their health care system over the next 5 years. Alberta is the only province in Canada to have a 5-year health funding commitment in place. Becoming the Best provides the detailed targets the province and AHS will use to drive further improvements in the health care system.

Some highlights Albertans can expect to see under the plan include:

- **reduced wait times** for hip surgery (60% reduction in wait times);
- **quicker access** to radiation oncologists for patients (70% reduction in wait times);
- **faster treatment** at emergency departments (90% of patients to be treated and admitted to hospital within 8 hours, and 90% of patients to be treated and released within 4 hours);
- **more spaces** for continuing care (68% increase in the number of people moved out of a hospital bed and into a community care setting); and, an
- **emphasis on wellness** to keep Albertans healthy (32% increase in child immunization rates).

“Our government has a clear plan for Alberta’s publicly funded health care system,” said Gene Zwozdesky, Minister of Health and Wellness. “It began with the establishment of one health authority, followed by an historic 5-year funding commitment and then the introduction of an Alberta Health Act. This new 5-year Health Action Plan builds on our commitment to create the best-performing publicly funded health system in Canada. It’s what Albertans told us they expect and it’s what we are delivering on.”

“The Health Action Plan clearly defines short and long-term goals for AHS that will ensure Albertans have access to quality health care,” said Dr. Chris Eagle, Acting President and Chief Executive Officer for Alberta Health Services. “With the stability provided by the 5-year funding plan, AHS is committed to delivering on these goals and being accountable to all Albertans.”

Some short-term actions to be included by March 2012 include:

- adding 360 more hospital beds and 3,000 more surgeries;
- expanding HealthLink (a 24/7 nurse telephone advice and health information service);
- adding 2,300 more continuing care spaces;
adding 65 more mental health staff to schools and clinics; and
launching a Wellness Forum involving community, business, and health leaders.

Some mid-to-long-term actions to be completed by March 2015 include:

- adding 2 more radiation therapy centres, one in Red Deer and one in Grande Prairie. These are in addition to the radiation therapy centre opened in Lethbridge this year;
- adding 3,000 more continuing care beds on top of the 2,300 listed under the short-term actions; and
- introducing new programs that promote healthy eating and active living.

These actions complement the initiatives outlined in the government’s Health Workforce Action Plan, which will ensure Alberta’s health workforce has the capacity to make these systemic changes happen.

The 5-year Health Action Plan sets out clearly defined targets for health system performance and outlines how AHS, the Government of Alberta and their health care partners will work together to meet those targets. Albertans will be able to track the progress of the health system against these targets online.

The College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta; the College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta; the Alberta College of Pharmacists; and the Health Quality Council of Alberta provided input and advice that was used to develop the 5-year Health Action Plan and a set of 50 supporting performance measures.

View Becoming the Best: Alberta’s 5-year Health Action Plan and the accompanying performance measures at www.health.alberta.ca or at www.albertahealthservices.ca.

The Alberta government has a clear plan for a strong economic recovery. An important part of The Way Forward is maintaining support for programs and services Albertans need most, such as health care, education and safe and vibrant communities. For more information on the plan visit Alberta.ca.

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Becoming the Best: Alberta’s 5-Year Health Action Plan
Questions and answers

1. Why will this plan make a difference in improving wait times and access for Albertans?

There are 3 important elements that will help the Government of Alberta and Alberta Health Services deliver on this plan.

First, this plan is tied to a strong vision: to build the best-performing publicly funded health system in Canada. That vision aligns with what Albertans want.

Second, Alberta Health Services has been provided with the first-of-its-kind 5-year predictable, stable funding that allows for the best possible planning for the delivery of health services.

Third, is accountability. This plan is also about building a more transparent and accountable health system.

- We’re putting our goals for the health system on paper; those goals are our commitments to Albertans.
- We’re publishing the plan that we and AHS have agreed on to work toward those goals. For example - 360 more hospital beds this year; that's more than the health system has added in a single year in at least the past 5 years.
- AHS is going to report publicly on its progress toward these goals, including the detailed Emergency data that they began posting on their website this month.
- We’re going to show Albertans exactly what the health system is doing to deliver the improvements we're promising. More beds, more operating rooms, more surgeries, more nurses and other health professionals, more radiation therapy centres for cancer treatment: we're going to show the progress we're making in building up the system, so Albertans can see for themselves.

2. How much is it going to cost to implement this Action Plan?

As stated in the plan, the Alberta government has a 5-year commitment to Alberta Health Services that includes funding increases of 6% in each of the first 3 years and 4.5% in each of the next 2 years. In 2010-11, AHS will receive $9 billion in base operating funding that increases to $11.1 billion in 2014-15.

3. Why are wait times targets not being reduced more quickly?

AHS is already acting on many of these performance measures. There is a clear action plan to address emergency department waits. This year, AHS has opened more than 800 continuing care beds, and another 600 more beds will be coming on stream. Surgeries are also ramping up. AHS is constantly reviewing its processes and services to see how it can provide better and faster health services. As one example, on November 19, Alberta Health Services had a meeting of clinical and operational leaders to develop new protocols to reduce Emergency Department wait times. These protocols will be piloted in some hospitals, and will build on the actions already identified in the 5-year plan.
4. In the short term, why are actions being announced that are already in place or that have already been rolled out?

The plan is intended to encompass actions taking place from 2010 to 2015. AHS and AHW have been aggressively working to address key health care priorities such as emergency room pressures and continuing care. We started developing this plan in the spring of 2010, and have made announcements on many initiatives. The 5-year plan integrates the actions that have already taken place with others that will come in the future, and shows the impact the overall plan will have on the health system.

5. What if the targets in the plan are not met?

Every effort will be made to meet and/or exceed the targets. The 5-year funding commitment provides the predictable, stable funding that allows for better long-range planning to help us meet those targets. This is an exercise in building a stronger health system, about being transparent about how we’re doing, and being accountable to Albertans. If the targets aren’t being met, Alberta Health and Wellness and Alberta Health Services will work together with their partners in the health system to determine why, and will take the steps necessary to improve the system so the targets can be achieved.

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