

VISION 2020

Health Care For Today And The Future | PHASE ONE | December 2008

HIGHLIGHTS

Albertans need and deserve an excellent health-care system. A system that provides the care we need today and tomorrow.

VISION 2020 identifies a new direction for Alberta's health system. This is a public health care system that is more effective and accountable and improves the quality of and accessibility to health services.

VISION 2020 sets the course for a health system that is geared to the needs of the patient. It recognizes that we all need to take more responsibility for our health and use the health care system in an appropriate way. **VISION 2020** is about a stronger, more efficient and sustainable publicly-funded health system.

VISION 2020 addresses these challenges:

Health-care facilities are not used equitably.

Alberta's largest hospitals and long-term care facilities operate above an average of 90 per cent occupancy, while more than half of hospitals with fewer than 20 beds operate below 75 per cent occupancy.

Access to some services takes too long.

Patients with non-urgent health concerns are using emergency departments while too many continuing care patients are being cared for in hospitals. This backs up admissions in hospitals and delays emergency room admissions and hospital services for people needing scheduled surgical procedures.

There are critical shortages of health service providers.

Alberta needs more than 1,500 nurses, and by 2020 the province may be short by more than 6,000 nurses. There is also a growing shortage of pharmacists, physical therapists, medical technologists, and especially health-care aides.

Our population is growing, rapidly aging and facing a significant burden of chronic disease.

Alberta's population is predicted to grow by another half million people by the year 2020, driving up demand for hospital and long-term care beds. Caring for people with chronic diseases and cancer will continue to drive up health-care costs.

Health-care costs continue to rise.

Today health-care spending is \$13.4 billion or 35 per cent of all provincial spending. In 2007/2008 regional health authorities spent \$8 billion, an amount that could grow to \$24 billion by 2020.

Finding the Alberta solution

These challenges are not unique to Alberta. Other provinces and countries are now paying health-care costs that outpace the demands of other public programs and economic growth.

Without substantial changes, a new 300-bed hospital will have to be built every two years to meet growing demands. At the same time, a shortage of health-care providers will make this a near impossible task.

An Alberta solution must be found. A balance must be made between meeting complex health-care demands and maintaining a system that is efficient and sustainable.

VISION 2020 will tackle **five key goals** to improve Alberta's health-care system:

1. Providing the right service, in the right place and at the right time

Health-care delivery needs to expand beyond the traditional bricks and mortar of hospitals and nursing homes.

The right services for an aging population

In 20 years, one in five Albertans will be over the age of 65. This means that more than 750,000 seniors will live in the province by 2028. Providing care options that closely match patients' needs will continue to be even more crucial as Alberta's population ages and we see an increased burden of diseases such as diabetes, hypertension and asthma.

The right services for mental health

There are a variety of community care approaches that effectively serve individuals with mental illness. Throughout Alberta, there are several innovative mental health programs currently underway. These include short-stay programs in Edmonton and Calgary, telemental health, shared care programs and the use of community-based care facilities.

GOAL 1 - What we need to do:

- Enhance services in short stay, non-hospital facilities and other clinic-type arrangements as an alternative to hospitalization;
- Develop incentive and training programs to encourage local recruitment of key health professionals and other staff;
- Develop more assisted living and supportive housing options for seniors;
- Address the need for more mental health and addictions services in non-hospital facilities and community settings, and
- Set performance benchmarks and targets that measure progress towards themes and monitor progress through quality assurance and compliance checking.

2. Enhancing access to high quality services in rural areas

Innovative ways to deliver services to rural Albertans need to be found. These options can include greater use of telehealth services, integrating emergency medical services with specialist/diagnostic and acute care services and expanding selected rural hospitals.

- Telehealth technology connects Albertans with health providers, no matter where they live. It connects patients and specialists securely and confidentially with pictures, voices and information so effective health-care decisions

can be made. Alberta already has one of the largest and best integrated telehealth networks in North America.

- Highly trained paramedics can have a phone conversation with a physician to determine whether a patient can actually be treated on site and released, or taken to a walk-in clinic, instead of requiring a trip to the emergency department.

GOAL 2 - What we need to do:

- Review the range of services at hospitals that are existing, approved and underway, and those in the capital planning process to ensure they reflect local requirements and evaluate what services can be delivered more effectively in either short-stay care, outpatient care or other clinic-type arrangements;
- Centralize key functions such as patient intake assessment and triage for select services to improve co-ordination on a provincial level;
- Enable emergency medical technicians to practise to the full extent of their knowledge and skills, supported by necessary medical supervision and training requirements;
- Develop incentive programs modeled after initiatives such as the Rural Physician Action Plan to encourage other professions to work in rural settings; and
- Promote use of telehealth for preventative care, treatment purposes, and increased access in local communities.

3. Matching workforce supply to demand for services

A modern health system requires multi-disciplinary teams and increased flexibility, and as a result the skills and training of health providers have been expanded in recent years.

There are now 29 primary care networks that provide basic health services to more than 1.9 million people in communities across Alberta. Primary care networks involve more than 1,600 physicians, as well as nurse practitioners, pharmacists, registered nurses, dietitians, physical therapists and other providers.

Pharmacists, registered nurses, dietitians, physical therapists and other providers can provide many health services that don't require a doctor. Instead of relying on a physician to help control their diabetes, for instance, a diabetic can see a pharmacist at the local drugstore for diabetes information and advice on topics such as medication, nutrition and exercise. Nurse practitioners can also help manage care for patients with chronic diseases.

GOAL 3 - What we need to do:

- Introduce targeted near-term and long-term recruitment and retention strategies to attract and retain staff, with a special focus on health-care aides and nurses;
- Address barriers that currently limit health-care providers from working to the full extent of their education, skill and experience;
- Support health care providers by implementing revised processes and tools, such as automation, that will help them do the job they have been trained to do;
- Promote team-based care by continuing to focus on the development of models such as primary care networks;
- Increase the percentage of health-care professionals working full-time to improve consistency of care and productivity; and
- Change reimbursement incentives to align with new models of care.

4. Improving co-ordination and delivery of care

Alberta's new single health service board has been established to provide an integrated system of care for residents across Alberta. The goal is for patients to have access to quality health care no matter where they live, while using health resources as effectively as possible.

Care teams

There are many opportunities to maximize and share resources across Alberta. Using teams

of different health-care professionals will allow more physician time to be spent on complex cases. This will allow pharmacists, nurse practitioners and other professionals to assume a greater role in care delivery. New roles such as patient navigators will support and assist patients, physicians and other health-care providers by co-ordinating patient services and acting as a liaison with other health-care providers.

Pharmaceuticals

Prescription drugs are a critical part of modern medicine and are essential in the management of acute and chronic illness. The Alberta government currently spends \$1.2 billion each year on prescription drugs and it is anticipated that total Alberta government pharmaceutical drug spending will reach \$2 billion within five years.

Prescription coverage in Alberta needs to be more accessible, affordable, efficient and therapeutically effective. Better management of government drug benefit programs and purchasing processes for prescription drugs will mean increased sustainability, fairness, consistency and equity across all programs.

Information technology

When patient records are lost or not available where and when they are needed, duplicate testing increases, patient safety is reduced, practitioner and patient time is wasted, and continuity of care decreases. Patients are also frustrated when they have to re-tell their health history to each health practitioner they encounter.

A well designed information technology system will improve information flow, improve access to patient information, and ensure patient safety regardless of the care setting. Alberta Netcare is an online, confidential electronic provincial

health record and a portal (website) that can be accessed by providers across all health settings. Standardized reporting of data will help to ensure information moves with the patient from the hospital to doctors' offices and across regions.

GOAL 4 - What we need to do:

- Prioritize improvements in service co-ordination, starting with cardiac care, cancer services, respiratory disorders, diabetes, joint problems, mental health and addictions, including the use of technology to monitor wait times in real time;
- Address unique service gaps for mental health, addictions and seniors' care;
- Undertake targeted operational service efficiency reviews to identify and implement process improvements;
- Improve Albertans' awareness of recommended healthy living practices, knowledge of the health system, personal health history and ability to book health services directly by implementing an on-line, personal and confidential health portal which will be made available to all Albertans;
- Pursue a long-term information and communication technology implementation and consolidation strategy for improved evidence-based decisions and timely information sharing; and
- Develop and implement a patient navigator model to support Albertans in accessing and navigating a co-ordinated and seamless health system.

5. Building a strong foundation for public health

Public health services are the foundation from which to build a more effective and sustainable health system now and into the future. Services that prevent disease and injury, promote health and protect the health of the population are effective ways to reduce disease and injury.

Improved health outcomes require better co-ordination and collaboration between public health and the delivery of health services, particularly primary health care. Improved health outcomes also require co-ordination between health and other sectors such as education, transportation and urban development.

GOAL 5 - What we need to do:

- Promote further integration of health promotion and disease and injury prevention with other health-care services such as family physicians, as well as non-health settings such as schools and workplaces;
- Focus on initiatives that support government and communities in encouraging healthy behaviours through the development of supportive and safe physical and social environments;
- Promote the Children's Mental Health Plan for Alberta: Three Year Action Plan (2008-2011) by increasing mental health services in schools and communities, reducing risk factors for special populations, and implementing early intervention strategies for children and youth at risk;
- Continue implementing the Alberta Infection Prevention and Control Strategy over the next 10 years and monitor progress on provincial infection prevention and control standards released in January 2008;
- Strengthen population health assessment and surveillance in order to better plan, implement and evaluate health strategies; and
- Develop a health impact assessment process for reviewing all new government policies.

Conclusion

VISION 2020 lays out a clear vision for Alberta's health system now and in the future.

This vision is about access to services when they are needed, in the right location, and in a way that is sustainable in the years ahead. It is about ensuring we invest in a system that is patient-focused, co-ordinated and efficient.

Achieving the five strategic goals identified in **VISION 2020** will result in:

- A health system that is focused on patients' needs;
- Improvements to patient access and quality care;
- A sustainable health system for the future;
- More effective use of resources and infrastructure; and
- Improvements in the way health services are organized and delivered.

The ultimate goal is to develop a stronger, more effective and sustainable publicly-funded health system for all Albertans.

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