

# Preventing a Two-tier Society

The recent Supreme Court of Canada decision to allow patients in Quebec to purchase private insurance emphasizes the need to make significant changes to the way our health care system is managed in order to increase access and decrease waiting times. The Quebec ruling was a wake-up call to every provincial government that our system is sustainable but must be updated to maintain the integrity of our public medicare plan.

The Supreme Court decision and recent initiatives by the Calgary Health Region reignited the debate over public versus private health care in Alberta.

*What the system really needs is bold innovation, strong leadership and, most of all, strong, steady management.*

We believe market forces work well for many things, but not for health care. Health care cannot be sold like hamburgers and running shoes and patients are not the same as customers. If you're having an asthma attack, you don't have time to shop around for the best deal.

**FACT:** The Montreal businessman who fought for private insurance so he could jump the medicare queue wouldn't have qualified for coverage. Insurers are very particular about whom they will insure and people with pre-existing conditions or chronic diseases will not be eligible for coverage. If you wait until you need surgery, it will be too late for coverage. Only healthy rich people need apply.

The Alberta Liberal Caucus strongly maintains that innovations can be implemented without private financing or for-profit delivery.

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Laurie Blakeman has been the member of the Legislative Assembly for Edmonton-Centre since 1997. She has held numerous critic portfolios, most recently Seniors, Community Development, Justice, Environment, Sustainable Resource Development, Solicitor General, and Gaming. Currently, Laurie is the Alberta Liberal Caucus Critic for Health and Wellness.

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Kevin Taft has been the member of the Legislative Assembly for Edmonton-Riverview since 2001. In 2004 he became leader of the Alberta Liberal Caucus, Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition. He has held numerous critic portfolios, including Health & Wellness, and Aboriginal Affairs & Northern Development. Currently, Kevin is the Alberta Liberal Caucus Critic for Municipal Affairs and Restructuring & Government Efficiency, and Leader of the Official Opposition.

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OUR PLAN FOR  
public health care

CREATING A *Healthy Future*



*bold innovation,  
strong, steady  
management*

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# What can we do?

THE ALBERTA LIBERAL CAUCUS WILL DEFEND THE HEALTH

OF ALBERTANS BY MODERNIZING MEDICARE IN THE FOLLOWING WAYS:

## Effective management of resources

The system doesn't need more money, it needs better management. The Sault Ste. Marie Group Health Centre in Ontario, the largest interdisciplinary health centre in Canada, is a great example of the potential future for universal health care. Teamwork and a focus on prevention must be the way of the future.



**FACT:** Last year in the United States, more than 50 per cent of personal bankruptcies were due to health care expenses.

## Social determinants of health

Poverty and income inequality are key determinants of health. Success by Six programs and a focus on early childhood health and development will pay off in the future. Investments in housing will also significantly impact the health of lower income Albertans. One dollar invested now translates into a savings of \$7 down the line.

The Alberta Liberal Caucus would also establish Health Impact Assessments to require all major government policy and funding decisions to undergo an examination of the policy's effect on factors like income, poverty, education and environment.

*For each new health “innovation” the government proposes, every citizen should be asking: How much does it cost?*

*What are the outcomes? Who benefits?*

## Management of chronic diseases

Canada's health care system is out of date. It was built to focus on acute care and does not manage chronic illness well. The best way to build an effective and affordable health system is to build a healthier society. Capital Health implemented a coordinated strategy to reduce wait times for patients with diabetes.

**MYTH:** Competitive private markets provide cheaper and better care.

**FACT:** No reputable scientific studies support these claims. Any savings realized come from lower wages, reduced service and corner cutting. Private health care does not create capital or labour.

**MYTH:** Private systems will reduce waiting lists by improving the efficiency of service delivery.

**FACT:** There are only so many doctors and the more you take out of the public system to work for queue jumpers, the longer the public waiting list will grow.

## Injury prevention

Injury is a serious public health problem because of its impact on the health of Albertans, including premature death, disability and the burden on our health care system. Comprehensive government initiatives and educational programs must focus on reducing workplace injuries and motor vehicle accidents.

**MYTH:** Offering private services to those who can afford to pay will increase patient choice.

**FACT:** Physicians may refuse to treat public patients because of the lower fees they receive through the public system. This would decrease patient choice and access for many Albertans.

## End-of-life palliative care

Improve availability and public awareness of palliative care to help individuals who want symptom control and comfort but are forced into high-tech, high cost acute care.



**FACT:** The United States spends 15 per cent of their GDP on health care, while Canada spends nine per cent of our GDP on health care. But American citizens receive less coverage and have worse health outcomes.

# Alberta's Opportunity

## ACCELERATING ACCESS

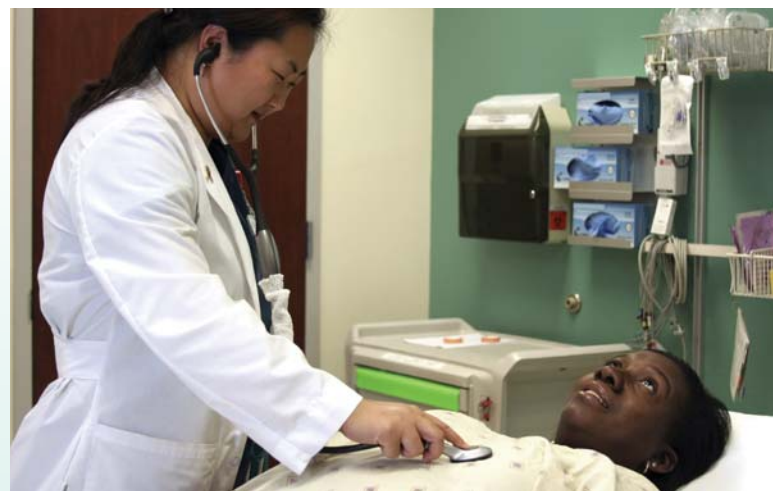
### POLICIES TO SPEED UP ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

*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

## ACCELERATING ACCESS

### 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.

## From *Alberta Horizons* to *Alberta's Opportunity*

*In the spring of 2006, the Alberta Liberal Caucus introduced Alberta Horizons, a discussion of Alberta's future. Ideas arising from one of the four themes of Alberta Horizons — social development — have led to "Accelerating Access," the Alberta Liberal Caucus plan to help Albertans enjoy rapid access to health care services.*

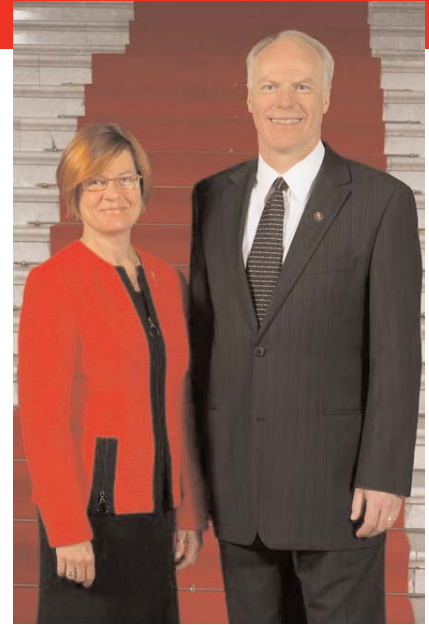
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*"Wherever I travel in this province, people keep telling me that they're tired of the endless debate over health care. They just want timely access to services. This plan provides that access, while keeping our health care system public and sustainable for the long term."*

— Kevin Taft, MLA  
Leader of the Alberta Liberal Caucus

*"For months now, intensive care and other units at hospitals in every major city in Alberta have been forced to periodically close because of staff shortages and lack of beds. And even when they're open, patients have to wait what seems like forever for treatment. Albertans can't wait any longer for health care. Alberta needs a functional, accessible health care system. That's what this plan, and an Alberta Liberal government, will deliver."*

— Laurie Blakeman, MLA  
Shadow Minister for Health & Wellness



## Vision and Values of the Alberta Liberal Caucus

### Our Vision

The Alberta Liberal Caucus looks ahead to an amazing future for Alberta. We see:

- unparalleled opportunity and enduring prosperity,
- citizens flourishing in a healthy environment, and
- fairness, humanity and generosity,
- open, accountable government.

### Our Values

We Value:

- an Alberta that works for all Albertans,
- equity, care and compassion
- individual rights and freedoms,
- the nurturing of every Albertan's talents and aspirations,
- building strong communities,
- the courage and foresight to grasp great possibilities,
- sustaining our natural environment for future generations,
- thrift and stewardship,
- universal, excellent public health care,
- imagination and initiative,
- flexible, exceptional public education,
- sound planning and management, and
- a flourishing economy based on an energetic private sector and an effective public sector,
- democracy with room for dissent.

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