



## Renewal of Alberta's Health Care System

### Issue

Alberta's publicly funded health care system is integral to the competitiveness of Alberta businesses. Employees and their families need timely and efficient ways to access the system. In 2007, lost productivity costs for employees waiting for medically necessary services exceeded \$63.5 million in Alberta.<sup>1</sup> In addition, health care spending continues to increase. Alberta Health and Wellness's real per capita expenditures have increased by nearly 75 per cent in the last 10 years. Allocations increased by approximately 18 per cent in 2010/11 alone, with health care now comprising about 41 per cent of the province's budget (\$15.8 billion).<sup>2</sup>

A comparison of OECD country health systems (based on universal access and public funding) found that Canada spends more, on an age-adjusted basis, than any other industrialized country with the exception of Iceland and Switzerland, yet ranks near the bottom on several key measures such as wait-times and access to technology.

### Calgary Chamber of Commerce Position

Over the past couple of years the province of Alberta has shown its commitment to quality health care by embarking upon a program of reform, including the amalgamation of regional health boards into a provincial board and the adoption of emergency medical services at the provincial level.

The government's *Vision 20/20*, which seeks to put the patient at the centre of the health care system, is a positive step to address system level reform. The ongoing reforms associated with *Vision 20/20* represent a tremendous opportunity to implement a set of changes resulting in a world-class health system that enhances not only health outcomes but also the economic climate of the whole province.

### Policy Recommendations

The Calgary Chamber of Commerce recommends that the Government of Alberta continue its renewal of the health care system focused on four key objectives:

#### **Ensure that the Alberta Health Act simplifies the legislative framework and aligns it with principles of flexibility in delivery and improved choice in access:**

1. Use the *Alberta Health Act* to simplify the existing legal framework and enable
  - i. Increased access to physicians and technology by competitive private delivery of public funded health care services.
  - ii. Facilitate the contracting out of publicly funded services.
2. Ensure that public and private facilities meet common standards of quality and care.

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<sup>1</sup> Fraser Institute, 2008. The Cost of Being Canadian. *Fraser Forum*. January

<sup>2</sup> Alberta Finance. 2010. *Budget 2010 Striking the Right Balance: Fiscal Plan Tables 2010*.

# 5 MINUTE POLICY BRIEFS



## **Pursue strategies that demonstrably improve access and the cost effectiveness of health care delivery:**

3. Recognize choice by allowing patients to purchase health care services including upgrades beyond the basic levels funded by government (e.g. orthopedic and ophthalmological devices), similar to other provinces.
4. Investigate innovative financing options, such as internal competition within the public health system, and patient-focused funding.
5. Review pilot programs that have improved access to diagnostic and surgical services and facilitate the replication of their successes in other parts of the system.

## **Focus on increased wellness and incentives for healthy lifestyle choices (personal accountability):**

6. Investigate incentives to encourage healthy behaviour to help individuals become more personally responsible for their health decisions.

## **Improve transparency and accountability in Alberta Health Services and Alberta Health and Wellness:**

7. Work with Alberta Health Services to develop financial, program and service data, capable of providing consistent accurate, comprehensive and transparent accounting of all costs, including the recognition of capital and operating expenditures.
8. Continue the development of primary care networks by primary care physicians.
9. Introduce baseline measurements with respect to cost-effectiveness, efficiency, quality, access and objective outcomes.