

Alberta's Cabinet Shuffle

On January 13, 2010, Premier Ed Stelmach appointed a new Cabinet. Eleven portfolios have new Ministers and 15 will soon be given new mandates. What does the Premier's cabinet shuffle mean for people with disabilities? To answer this question, ACCD took a closer look at three Cabinet Ministers whose portfolios directly impact Alberta's disability community: Mary Anne Jablonski, Minister of Seniors and Community Supports; Gene Zwozdesky, Minister of Health and Wellness; and Thomas Lukaszuk, Minister of Employment and Immigration.

The Honourable Mary Anne Jablonski, Minister of Seniors and Community Supports



Alberta Seniors and Community Supports plays a key role in the lives of many Albertans with disabilities. Mary Anne Jablonski continues her work as Minister of this portfolio, a post she has held since March 2008. During this time, Minister Jablonski has overseen improvements and funding increases to many of the Ministry's programs and services, such as the increase to the AISH financial benefit in the 2009-2010 budget and improvements to Alberta Aids to Daily Living supports.

Minister Jablonski was also at the helm when

steps were taken to ensure people with disabilities would benefit from the Federal Government's Registered Disabilities Savings Plan. The Provincial Government fully exempted the federal registered disabilities plan as both income and assets when considering eligibility for provincial assistance programs like AISH, the Alberta Seniors Benefit Program, and Income Support Programs. The RDSP is a substantial benefit to Albertans with disabilities.

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Minister of Health and Wellness



Shortly after Gene Zwozdesky was sworn in as Health Minister in January he vowed to take a hands-on approach to the health portfolio, and he is doing just that. He has already reversed several decisions made to Alberta's publicly-funded health care system. Planned bed closures at Alberta Hospital Edmonton have been halted, with the exception of 100 beds for geriatric psychiatric patients – these patients are being moved to Villa Caritas, a 150 bed facility currently under construction in Edmonton's West end. Proposed acute care bed closures in Edmonton and Calgary hospitals (300, in total, between the two cities) have also been put on hold.

Minister Zwozdesky is reviewing and taking into consideration a list of recommendations

prepared by the Minister's Advisory Committee on Health. All of the committee's recommendations are meant to improve the delivery of health care in Alberta. One of the recommendations states that Alberta should create its own Health Act, a piece of legislation that would have to fit within the parameters of the Canada Health Act. The recommendation goes on to state that an Alberta health act would simplify the complex body of legislation and regulations that currently guide the province's health care system.

Minister Zwozdesky is also considering the recommendation that Alberta should create a charter of rights for patients and adopt a policy ensuring evidence-based decision making on future changes. One of his goals is to rebuild Albertans' trust in the government's handling of health care, and to improve access to the publicly funded system, especially for people with disabilities, the homeless, the poor, and seniors.

The Honourable Thomas Lukaszuk, Minister of Employment and Immigration



Despite having less than 10 years of political experience behind him, Thomas Lukaszuk knows a thing or two about the Employment

and Immigration portfolio. An immigrant himself, he and his family came to Canada, from Poland, when he was 11 years old. He says he has an intuitive understanding of the immigrant experience, based on his family's own experiences with unemployment and not speaking English upon their arrival in Canada. But the portfolio deals with much more than helping newcomers adjust to Canadian culture. Employment and Immigration offers several programs and services for low-income and unemployed Albertans, including health, income, and child benefits. Fortunately, he has experience dealing with these issues, too.

In 2001, Minister Lukaszuk chaired the Low-Income Programs Review Committee. The committee was tasked with reviewing and gaining an in-depth understanding of key issues regarding programs delivered by Employment and Immigration, which was called Alberta Human Resources and Employment at that time. Many of the key issues that were identified then remain as issues today: financial support, affordable housing, and support for the cost of raising children, to name a few.

For more information on these and other Ministers, please visit <http://www.premier.alberta.ca/team/> or contact ACCD's office at 780-488-9088 or toll free at 1-800-387-2514.

Education for Life Bursary: Apply Now!

June 30, 2010 is the application deadline for ACCD's 2010-2011 Education for Life Bursary. Individuals with disabilities seeking to continue their education as first-time, post-secondary students are eligible for bursaries ranging from \$300 to \$800. Details and an application form can be found on our web site at www.accd.net, or you can contact the ACCD office at 780-488-9088 in Edmonton or toll free at 1-800-387-2514.



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