

New Project: Barrier-Free Health and Medical Services in Alberta



The Issues

Through research and stakeholder consultations, ACCD knows that barriers in doctors' offices and medical clinics hinder access to health and medical services for people with disabilities. ACCD has developed a project plan to identify barriers – physical, attitudinal, or otherwise – and gaps in existing policy. We will achieve this through a thorough review of existing policies, standards, procedures, literature, and evidence gathered through community consultations.

Once a better understanding of existing barriers and gaps is achieved, ACCD will develop a draft policy-and-recommendations document, which can serve as a guide for barrier-free health and medical services in Alberta. The document will be produced in consultation with our advisory committee, which consists of government personnel, medical professionals, disability community representatives, and various experts in the field of delivery of health and medical services.

Goals and Benefits to Albertans

The goal of our project is to remove barriers that exclude Albertans with disabilities from fully participating in the health and medical services system. This will benefit any Albertan who, at some point in his or her life, might acquire a short- or long-term disability, seniors and those with age-related disabilities, and any person who accesses health and medical services in a community setting (e.g., diagnostic labs, doctors' offices), as Alberta Health Services shifts its focus to community-based health and medical services.

Project Focus

Keeping in line with Alberta Health Services' mandate to strengthen community-based health and medical services, our project will focus on doctor's offices and diagnostic labs. We will determine accessibility in patient waiting areas, accessibility of medical exam rooms, and accessibility of medical equipment used for various diagnostic tests and exams.

Your View

Have you experienced gaps or barriers in Alberta's medical services? ACCD's project team wants to hear from you. If you would like to share your story, or if you would like more information on this project, please contact Melita at 780-488-9088 or email her at melita@accd.net.

Budget 2010-11

ACCD recently reported on Premier Ed Stelmach's cabinet shuffle and how changes might impact people with disabilities. On February 9, Alberta's Finance Minister, the Honourable Ted Morton, announced the budgets for the ministries. As the government tightens spending to manage deficits, we asked the following question: "What is happening with funding for programs and services for people with disabilities?" To find the answer, ACCD took a closer look at the government's 2010-11 budgets for three key ministries: Seniors and Community Supports, Health and Wellness, and Employment and Immigration.



Seniors and Community Supports

Seniors and Community Support's budget for 2010-11 is nearly 2 billion dollars. This is an increase of 43 million dollars, or 2.2 %, from the previous year. The increase is meant to maintain current programs and services, while accommo-

dating increased case loads. The following is a summary of how budget dollars will be distributed:

- \$733 million will be directed towards AISH. This is an increase of \$18 million, or 2.6 per cent, from the previous year. This increase will maintain the current monthly AISH benefit of \$1,188 and the average monthly health benefit of \$350, which helps approximately 40,000 clients.
- Funding for Persons with Developmental Disabilities will remain the same as in 2009-10, at \$597 million.
- Alberta Aids to Daily Living also remains the same, at \$113 million.
- \$50 million to develop 500 new affordable supportive living spaces as part of the government's Continuing Care Strategy.

Health and Wellness

In response to public demands that the health care system be maintained and improved, Health and Wellness received a \$15 billion increase in health spending. This includes \$759 million to pay off Alberta Health Services' accumulated deficit, and a base operating grant increase of 6%, with increases each year over then next 4 years. The following is a brief summary of how Health and Wellness' budget will be distributed:

- \$3.3 billion for physician compensation and development, a \$253-million or 8.2 per-cent increase.
- \$930 million for drugs and supplemental health benefits, including \$551 million to provide prescription drug benefits for seniors.
- \$799 million for various services provided by health professionals, such as oral surgeons, optometrists and podiatrists, as well as vaccination programs, tissue and blood services and continuing care initiatives.
- \$176 million for capital grants for health information systems and diagnostic and medical equipment, and amortization.
- Nearly \$2.5 billion over three years is budgeted to support health capital projects.

Employment and Immigration

Employment and Immigration will receive a budget reduction of \$87 million, or 7.3%, in 2010-11. Money for Employment and Immigration services and programs will be distributed as follows:

- \$582 million will be set aside for income supports and related health benefits, a \$47-million reduction from 2009-10. The government hopes to realise savings by redirecting potential expected-to-work income-support clients to employment services, training, or work opportunities. New-learner benefits will also be reduced.
- The \$192 million that employment and training programs received last year has been reduced by \$15 million, to \$177 million. Although tuition allocations for academic upgrading and contracted services have been reduced, funding for work training programs will increase to \$74 million.
- In 2010, Alberta's minimum wage will remain at \$8.80. However, Minister Lukaszuk is requesting a review of this policy, to determine if this standard is what's best for Albertans.

If you have questions or comments about the Government of Alberta's 2010-11 budget, please contact ACCD's Edmonton office at 780-488-9088 or toll-free at 1-800-387-2514.

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