

BACKGROUND



May 25, 2017

Better Healthcare for Albertans: A Report by the Office of the Auditor General of Alberta

What is the purpose of this report?

Using our skills as legislative auditors, we have developed this report to offer a broader analysis of what has frustrated a comprehensive shift toward best-quality care in Alberta. This report is our analysis of the root causes behind the lack of progress toward integrated care.

Better Healthcare for Albertans identifies opportunities based on models from other jurisdictions to take the entire health system to a higher level—to make a quantum leap rather than continuing to make incremental change, reorganize or move in circles.

What prompted this report?

Since 1990 the Office of the Auditor General has conducted over 40 audits on aspects of the Alberta health system, including seniors care, mental health and addictions, primary care and chronic disease management. The Department of Health and Alberta Health Services have implemented many of our recommendations for improvement from our previous audits, and are working toward implementing more recent recommendations. Alberta Health Services has also undertaken significant initiatives to improve quality of care.

As of today there remain 41 outstanding recommendations in the health sector, 19 of which have been outstanding for more than three years. This is a frustration for all—including the people working in the system—because as a result Albertans are not receiving the quality of care they should expect for what they are paying.

The current system is not able to handle our recommendations, all of which point to an integrated healthcare framework. This report is our attempt to help the government better deal with our recommendations for improvement.

What is integrated healthcare?

Integrated care means a system centred on patients, not on administrative needs or the traditional ways of doing things. In an integrated healthcare system:

- Teams of providers in primary care, acute care and continuing care work on a single plan for each patient, designed to meet that patient's care goals.
- Each individual patient's health information flows to all of that person's care providers.
- Decision support tools bring the latest medical knowledge to bear wherever the patient receives care.
- Care is delivered in the most appropriate location—for example, in a community setting rather than in a hospital whenever possible.
- Patients are engaged in their own care, receiving information and taking part in decisions.
- Constant measurement and benchmarking of care quality and patient outcomes by everyone in the system keeps care at a high level.
- Effective integrated care is built around the moment an Albertan enters the system—ideally the moment you are born up to the end of your life. And whenever and wherever you re-enter or use the system for the rest of your life, every medical professional you interact with has access to your full medical history.

Why don't we have integrated care now?

The current system is built around the traditional way of providing healthcare: independently acting healthcare providers offering episodic care. But the nature of healthcare is changing. You no longer go to one family doctor for everything. Your primary care family physician is now often your entry point into the system, the person who facilitates your care by involving specialists and other care providers depending on what treatment you require.

So while there is a desire and a commitment to have an integrated care model in Alberta, the current system does not accommodate this new way of managing healthcare. Many of our recommendations in previous audits have related to making the system less fragmented and more integrated. This report identifies systemic barriers that impede progress on implementation of those recommendations.

Why do you say more money is not the answer?

The proof is in the examples we looked at in other jurisdictions. Their budgets are similar, or smaller, compared to Alberta in terms of per capita spending, but their success is down to how the money is spent and the fact that investment is directly aligned with outcomes related to the quality of health of the patients and population.

What is the single most important thing that needs to be done to improve the system?

To make a difference, we must take action immediately. And no one part of the systems can effect change on its own.

Everyone in the system—the minister, government, all MLAs, healthcare providers and professionals, and individual Albertans—must act together immediately if we are to make a difference in the lives of Albertans.

- The **government** must provide leadership to make integrating care a priority and hold others in the system accountable for results around the quality of care and health of Albertans.
- **All MLAs** must make decisions for the long-term, not from the perspectives of short-term politics, election cycles, isolated controversies and lobbying of local interests.
- **Healthcare providers and medical professionals** must change how they work, break down the silos, integrate services, and align data and funding flows around the care needs of patients.
- The biggest change needed is for **Albertans** to get more involved. Individual Albertans must take a more active role and interest in managing every aspect of their health and their healthcare.

Read the full report at www.oag.ab.ca.

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For more information, please contact:

Kimberly Nishikaze, Communications Director

Telephone: 780.422.6512 | Mobile: 587.926.1341 | Email: knishikaze@oag.ab.ca

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