

# The President's Letter

Dr. Christopher J. (Chip) Doig



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**In this letter:**

- **Alberta Health Act consultations a welcome departure from past practices**

Dear Member:

When legislation to establish an *Alberta Health Act* is introduced at the fall session of the Legislature, it will be the culmination of nearly a year-long process to consult with Albertans and to engage physicians and other health care professionals.

After the 16-member Minister's Advisory Committee on Health released its report, "A Foundation For Alberta's Health System" January 20, the Provincial Government endorsed its four recommendations and Premier Ed Stelmach assigned its co-chair, MLA Fred Horne (Edmonton-Rutherford), to consult with Albertans on how the recommendations should be implemented.

The advisory committee reported on the results of its website-based public survey, named 33 organizations and individuals who had made presentations, and listed 37 others that had provided written submissions. The Alberta Medical Association's (AMA's) October 19, 2009 brief to the advisory committee is available at <http://www.albertadoctors.org/AdvisoryCommittee/AMABrief2009>.

Mr. Horne is nearing the end of consultations with the public and stakeholders that began April 29. About 600 Albertans have participated in a series of 28 public forums (16 held, 12 remaining) in 23 communities that were developed with the 12 Alberta Health Services (AHS) health advisory councils. Various stakeholders, including the Alberta Medical Association and the Friends of Medicare, have met with Mr. Horne.

The AMA's Board of Directors met with Mr. Horne June 4, and we are now finalizing another brief for his consideration. It will address Medicare's social contract with the medical profession: "prescriptive" vs. "enabling" legislation; the "reasonable compensation" requirements of the *Canada Health Act*; fragmentation of care and its negative effects for patients resulting from Alberta's preoccupation with access; and physicians as partners in the health care system.

His efforts also include a new website survey, which almost 900 Albertans thus far have completed. I encourage you to do so at <http://www.health.alberta.ca/initiatives/your-health-act.html>. Last fall's survey attracted 3,191 Albertans – 924 nurses but only 10 physicians.

While an *Alberta Health Act* is expected to be the centerpiece of the government's fall agenda, development of a patient's charter is also anticipated. Both the AMA and the Canadian Medical Association have undertaken considerable research and consensus building with patient-advocacy organizations regarding the intent, goals, tone and content for a patient charter. Alberta has the opportunity to become the first province in Canada to embrace a charter, and the AMA is most interested in helping this to occur.

To date I have been extremely impressed with the government's willingness – led by Mr. Horne – to consult with and listen to the two most important stakeholders in health care: (i) the public, our patients, and (ii) physicians and the other health professionals who care for these Albertans.

The Alberta Medical Association commits significant resources to its Patients First® advocacy. When it comes to legislation and to regulations under that legislation, the AMA and other stakeholders are usually responding to a bill tabled in the Legislative Assembly. The government's approach in this instance has been a most welcome departure from the usual way of doing business!

I will continue to update you on the AMA's activities regarding the forthcoming legislation and on other activities such as the province-wide medical staff bylaws with Alberta Health Services, a new model for medical staff representation and advocacy, and Negotiations 2011.

Yours truly,

Christopher J. (Chip) Doig, MD, MSc, FRCPC  
President

P.S. My June 2 *President's Letter* dealt with Alberta Health Services contracting for cataract surgeries with two private surgical facilities in both Calgary and Edmonton. Due to some confusion in wording of the AHS news release, in the case of Edmonton this was inaccurate. Only one private surgical facility is involved in Edmonton with the remainder of cases being contracted to the Royal Alexandra Hospital.