

The President's Letter

Dr. Christopher J. (Chip) Doig



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July 16, 2010

Dear Member:

In this letter:

- ***AMA delivers seven-page brief on proposed Alberta Health Act***
 - ***New legislation must adhere to principles of the Canada Health Act and respect the patient-physician relationship.***
 - ***All Albertans must have timely and safe access to quality care based primarily on need rather than ability to pay.***

Last Friday the Alberta Medical Association (AMA) delivered its brief regarding a new legislative framework for health care in Alberta to MLA Fred Horne (Edmonton-Rutherford), who is responsible for consulting with Albertans about a new *Alberta Health Act*.

It is a companion to the AMA's much more comprehensive brief to the Minister's Advisory Committee on Health last October. Chief among the points raised in the concise, focused, seven-page document (available at <http://www.albertadoctors.org/PresLet/Index>) are:

- An *Alberta Health Act* must adhere to the principles of the *Canada Health Act*, as well as adding new principles of "accessibility" and "sustainability."
- The Alberta Medical Association supports a patient's charter.
- Current legislation is "prescriptive"; it defines publicly funded services as hospital-based services and "medically required" services provided by physicians. This places a locus of responsibility for decision-making about individual patients and their health needs within a trusted, confidential patient-physician relationship.
 - An "enabling" framework could "vest overwhelming authority for decision-making to government ministers and departments through regulations and policies."
- Safety, quality, evidence-based decisions and sustainability – not lobbying – should determine whether or not government pays for services not required by the *Canada Health Act*.

- The *Health Professions Act* has fragmented care “which can compromise safety and quality, can devalue cost-effectiveness and is contrary to the government’s goal of sustainability.”
- Given the leadership role of physicians within Alberta’s health care system, the Alberta Medical Association should have formal recognition in the *Alberta Health Act*.

With our advocacy, the AMA hopes to ensure that the Alberta government does not pursue changes that could have the unintended consequences of weakening the province’s health care system.

Our priority is that the new framework put Patients First®. Although the AMA generally supports the report from the Minister’s Advisory Committee on Health, we are raising these points at this time so that all MLAs are aware of the potential implications.

Board of Directors’ meeting

The AMA Board of Directors is meeting July 22-23. Agenda topics include: 2010-11 business plan; provincial medical staff bylaws; the Canadian Medical Association’s General Council August 22-25 in Niagara Falls; primary care strategy, clinical networks and the physician compensation strategy; a provincial academic alternate relationship plan; Negotiations 2011; and preparations for the fall Representative Forum September 24-25 in Edmonton.

Yours truly,

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President