



Ministers' Statement

May 9, 2005

Auditor General's Report on the Government of Alberta's Seniors Core Services and Programs

The Auditor General, this government and our departments have a common goal: to ensure that Albertans receive quality programs and services for public expenditures. Quality services and programs for seniors are respectful, safe, preserve their dignity and, to the extent possible, support their independence.

The majority of seniors receiving care through publicly funded home care, assisted living and long-term care facilities do receive quality care. However, we do have some concerns.

Our departments have already taken action. Our goal is to build a continuing care system that works in partnership with residents and their families, and puts their needs first.

Working with health authorities, Alberta Health and Wellness has launched several initiatives over the last few months. Those initiatives include:

- Development of new standards for Continuing Care Health Service Standards;
- Implementation of improved resident assessment tools, which will show whether individual care needs, and provincial health goals, are being met;
- Development of standardized elements for contracts between Regional Health Authorities and long-term care operators;
- Development of a training program for health care aides, and
- Increasing the average care hours per resident from 3.1 to 3.4 per day by the end of this fiscal year (2005/2006).

Updating the Continuing Care Health Services Standards has been one of Alberta Health and Wellness' first priorities. These new standards will focus care practices around the needs of the individual. By focusing how we care for residents around their individual needs, we improve their quality of life, as well as the quality of care. Our proposed new standards will:

- require development of a care plan for each client, and focus measuring and reporting on the effectiveness of care provided to each individual;
- clearly spell out the responsibilities of clients and their families, health care providers, operators, Regional Health Authorities and the department; and
- establish a process for regular reviews and upgrading of standards to meet professional best practices.

Alberta Seniors and Community Supports will build on the Auditor General's recommendations by continuing work in the following areas:

- re-establish reviews of seniors lodge facilities while lodge standards are being clarified and

enhanced;

- review how the Alberta Seniors Benefit Program meets the financial needs of seniors following the July 2004 increase to income thresholds and monthly payments;
- develop accommodations standards for long-term care, supportive living environments and seniors lodges, and ensure appropriate mechanisms are in place to monitor compliance with these standards.

MLA Len Webber, Chair of the Healthy Aging and Continuing Care in Alberta Implementation Advisory Committee, and MLA Ray Prins, Chair of the Seniors' Advisory Council, will conduct a stakeholder review of the standards beginning immediately and concluding by the end of August this year.

We want to thank the Auditor General for his work, which was thorough and thoughtful.

His recommendations support the work that is underway, and will help us identify further actions. For that reason, we intend to accept all the recommendations in his [report](#).

We will be working together with Regional Health Authorities and health care providers on several further initiatives to improve monitoring for compliance with standards, measures of the cost effectiveness of services, and planning for the future. Alberta Health and Wellness will introduce more frequent, unannounced quality assurance visits to long-term care facilities with quality improvement and monitoring teams composed of clinical and management operations specialists, in addition to the current work of the Health Facilities Review Committee.

We want to emphasize that although 70 per cent of standards were fully met, and that in many cases Regional Health Authorities have moved beyond the current standards for care, we need to do much better. Standards need to be improved, and this is a core piece of what we will do.

In that work, as in all our actions, we will keep our eyes on the target: working with those in care to clearly understand and respond to their individual medical, physical and social needs.

This will mean change and we face challenges. It requires ensuring that a variety of services are available and accessible, emphasizing both quality of life and quality of care, and promoting independence to the extent possible. Working with those who need care, their families, health care providers and Regional Health Authorities, we can meet those challenges.

Honourable Iris Evans, Minister of Health and Wellness

Honourable Yvonne Fritz, Minister of Seniors and Community Supports

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Background

May 9, 2005

Response to Recommendations of the Auditor General's Report on Seniors Services and Programs

Recommendation

Response

The Department of Health and Wellness, working with the Department of Seniors and Community Supports and the Regional Health Authorities, update the Basic Service Standards for services in long-term care facilities and implement a system to regularly review and update the Basic Service Standards to ensure they remain current.

The Department of Health and Wellness and the Regional Health Authorities, working with the Department of Seniors and Community Supports, improve their systems for monitoring the compliance of long-term care facilities with the Basic Service Standards.

- Alberta Health and Wellness has developed new Continuing Care Health Service Standards, which include a process for regular review involving Regional Health Authorities and stakeholders to allow updates as needed.
- MLA Len Webber, Chair of the Healthy Aging and Continuing Care in Alberta Implementation Advisory Committee, and MLA Ray Prins, Chair of the Seniors' Advisory Council, will conduct a stakeholder review of care and accommodation service standards, which will be completed by the end of August. Alberta Seniors and Community Supports is updating accommodation standards for long-term care facilities. A system to regularly review and update these standards will be implemented later this year.
- Both departments will work with Regional Health Facilities to improve systems for monitoring compliance with standards.
- The new standards for continuing care include improved information and reporting requirements and tools for long-term care facilities and Regional Health Authorities.

The Department of Health and Wellness and the Regional Health Authorities, working with the Department of Seniors and Community Supports, assess the effectiveness of services in long-term care facilities.

The Department of Health and Wellness, working with the Department of Seniors and Community Supports, collect sufficient information about facility costs from the Regional Health Authorities and long-term care facilities to make informed accommodation rate and funding decisions.

The Department of Health and Wellness, working with the Regional Health Authorities and the Department of Seniors and Community Supports, identify the information required from facilities to enable the Department and Authorities to monitor long-term care facilities' compliance with legislation.

- Alberta Health and Wellness is working with Regional Health Authorities to develop standardized elements for contracts with long-term care providers.
- Alberta Health and Wellness will introduce more frequent, unannounced quality assurance visits to long-term care facilities with teams of clinical and management operations specialists, in addition to the work of the Health Facilities Review Committee.
- Alberta Health and Wellness will continue implementing new tools to measure the quality and effectiveness of services, including patient assessment, individualized care planning, medication use, diet and health services provided. The tools were developed by internationally recognized experts in continuing care, and will be fully implemented in all long-term care facilities by April 2007.
- Alberta Seniors and Community Supports has included a new performance measure on accommodation services in long-term care facilities in its 2005-2008 business plan.
- Both departments are working with Regional Health Authorities on measures of cost effectiveness.
- The Department of Seniors and Community Services, is responsible for setting accommodation rates and has established reporting requirements on accommodation-related expenses from facility operators.
- Both departments will work with Regional Health Authorities to collect additional information to support accommodation rate changes and health care service funding decisions.
- Provisions for monitoring and reporting on compliance with health service standards and legislation will be included in the new Continuing Care Health Service Standards.
- Alberta Seniors and Community

The Department of Health and Wellness, working with Regional Health Authorities and the Department of Seniors and Community Supports, develop a long-term plan to meet future needs for services in long-term care facilities. The Department publicly report on progress made towards goals in the plan.

The Department of Health and Wellness require Regional Health Authorities to periodically update and report on progress made to implement their Ten-Year Continuing Care Strategic Service Plans.

The Department of Health and Wellness and the Department of Seniors and Community Supports establish standards for care and housing services provided to assisted living and other supportive living facilities

The Department of Seniors and Community Supports:

1. update the Seniors Lodge Standards and implement a process to maintain the standards.
2. improve its systems to monitor management bodies' compliance with the Seniors Lodge Standards.

The Department of Seniors and Community Supports:

1. improve the measures it uses to assess the effectiveness of the Seniors Lodge Program.
2. obtain sufficient information periodically to set the minimum disposable income of seniors used as a basis for seniors lodge rent charges.

Supports will identify required information in conjunction with the establishment of a system to monitor compliance with accommodation standards.

- The departments will work with Regional Health Authorities to develop long-range plans, and will report publicly on progress towards the goals in those plans.
- Alberta Health and Wellness will require Regional Health Authorities to include longer-term planning for continuing care in their three-year health planning processes, beginning with the current cycle.
- The new standards for continuing care health services will also apply to assisted living, supportive living and home care services.
- Alberta Seniors and Community Supports, is developing accommodation standards for assisted and supportive living facilities. These standards should be implemented later this year.
- The departments will coordinate health care and accommodation standards.
- Alberta Seniors and Community Supports is updating lodge standards and will monitor compliance with the revised standards. The standards should be implemented later this year.
- The program provides supportive housing for lower income seniors. Currently, 89 per cent of lodge residents have low to moderate income.
- Quality of service will be monitored through systems that will be developed in conjunction with the accommodation standards update.
- Alberta Seniors and Community Supports will continue to annually monitor the senior lodge rent rates in relation to the minimum disposable

The Department of Seniors and Community Supports improve its processes for identifying the increasing care needs of lodge residents and consider this information in its plans for the Seniors Lodge Program.

The Department of Seniors and Community Supports improve the measures it uses to assess whether it is meeting the objective of the Alberta Seniors Benefit Program.

The Department of Seniors and Community Supports obtain further information necessary to make income threshold, cash benefit and supplementary accommodation benefit decisions for the Alberta Seniors Benefit Program.

- income of seniors.
- The department will work with the Department of Health and Wellness and Regional Health Authorities to improve processes for identifying the increasing care needs of lodge residents and consider this information in planning for the Seniors Lodge Program.
- Alberta Seniors and Community Supports uses income to assess the need for financial assistance. The department will improve and develop model(s) and datasets to better identify seniors' financial needs.
- Alberta Seniors and Community Supports will be looking to improve and develop model(s) and datasets to assist in the decision making process.

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