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Ensuring Health Care Sustainability – Share Your Views

By Linda Larson, MLA and Judy Darcy, MLA

British Columbians enjoy high standards of health care, including the longest life expectancy and the lowest rates of obesity, smoking, and infant mortality in Canada. Maintaining a strong health care system which meets the needs of all citizens is a priority for all British Columbians.

BC's health care system has changed dramatically in recent decades to meet the demands of citizens and respond to the changing health care environment. BC has supported new treatments, drugs, and diagnostic technologies, leading to significant improvements in the health and longevity of British Columbians. Our health care system has also had to evolve to meet changing requirements, notably a greater emphasis on treating long-term chronic conditions, and the pressures of a growing and ageing population.

Health care is the single largest area of provincial spending, accounting for almost 40 percent of total government spending. The estimated budget for the Ministry of Health in the 2014/15 fiscal year is almost \$17 billion. Budget pressures are expected to intensify in the future as a result of the following cost drivers:

- 2% general inflation
- 1.4% population growth
- 1% population ageing
- 0.9% increased utilization
- 0-0.7% health inflation

BC's Legislative Assembly has tasked the all-party Select Standing Committee on Health with identifying strategies for maintaining the sustainability and quality of BC's health care system. The Committee has been meeting with Ministry representatives, health care researchers, and stakeholders to seek their views on how to address the challenges faced by our health care system.

As the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Select Standing Committee on Health, we are asking British Columbians to share their ideas on how we can continue to ensure the sustainability and improvement of our health care system. In order to focus the consultation we are seeking submissions that address any or all of the following questions:

- Access to high quality health care for all British Columbians, regardless of where they live, is a key priority for the health care system. Providing health care for British Columbians who live in rural communities presents significant challenges, including the recruitment and retention of health care professionals to work in rural communities.
 - **How can we improve health and health care services in rural British Columbia? In particular, what long-term solutions can address the challenges of recruitment and retention of health care professionals in rural British Columbia?**

- The delivery of health care often depends on interdisciplinary teams of health care professionals from different disciplines – doctors, nurses, pharmacists, social workers, counselors, psychiatrists, physiotherapists, midwives, and others – who work together to provide patients with care. The coordinated provision of health care by interdisciplinary teams contributes to the provision of high quality, integrated, and efficient health care services.
 - **How can we create a cost-effective system of primary and community care built around interdisciplinary teams?**

- End-of-life care is an important part of a sustainable, efficient health care system, providing effective care with comfort, dignity, and quality of life for dying individuals. End-of-life services are delivered by a range of professionals who provide pain and symptom management, community nursing and rehabilitation services, home support, respite services, and residential hospice care.
 - **What best practices can be implemented to improve end-of-life care?**

- Problematic substance use affects people of all ages from all walks of life, and imposes significant costs on individuals, government, and society as a whole. Focusing resources on evidence-based best practices for recovery programs can yield long-term positive outcomes in terms of individual well-being and effective and efficient services.
 - **How can we enhance the effectiveness of addiction recovery programs?**

Submissions should include an explanation of the anticipated benefits and a justification of the costs involved.

To make a submission to the Committee or learn more about our work please visit our website at <http://www.leg.bc.ca/cmt/health/index.asp>. All submissions will be carefully reviewed and considered by the Committee. The deadline for submissions is December 31, 2014.

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