



June 2, 2010

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Nothing to Gain and Everything to Lose

New Parkland Institute report says Alberta Health Act initiative should not proceed

EDMONTON – A new report released this morning by the U of A's Parkland Institute says that the current initiative by Alberta Health Services to create an Alberta Health Act carries too many risks and should not proceed as currently conceived.

The report, the first of two in a series, is entitled "The New Alberta Health Act: Risks and Opportunities". It was written by Parkland Research Director Diana Gibson and Vancouver-based health policy researcher Colleen Fuller.

Gibson and Fuller examined all the documents associated with the proposal for a new Alberta Health Act and they identified three areas of concern:

1. the expansion of for-profit delivery;
2. the loss of critical protections for the public system and quality standards with the merging of existing health care acts; and
3. the risks of increased privatization, and a greater emphasis on individual responsibility with the patient charter.

"There is nothing to be gained with a new health act in the way it has been proposed thus far that could not already be done under current legislation, but there is much that could be lost," says Gibson.

The study finds that the Act is being influenced by pressure from Alberta Health Services and lobby groups to expand the role of private for-profit health care providers.

"Some key questions are whether the new act will maintain the provincial laws that prevent doctors from 'double-dipping', that is, working within the public system and at the same time charging privately. In short, will it allow private insurance and delivery full free rein?" asks Gibson.

"It would be different," she says, "if the real objectives of the process were to strengthen the public health system, better integrate the community sector within it, and to put a limit on any further for-profit delivery. But that is not the way it has been presented thus far."

The second report in the series, which is due to be released in the coming weeks, will focus on how the process could take advantage of those opportunities.

The Parkland Institute is a non-partisan public policy research institute in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Alberta.

The New Alberta Health Act: Risks and Opportunities is available on the Parkland Institute web site: www.parklandinstitute.ca, or in hard-copy from the Parkland Institute at 780-492-8558.

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