

Friday January 17th, Minister Fred Horne's statement about the Seniors Occupation of his office

*"Yesterday, Public Interest Alberta (PIA) and Friends of Medicare (FOM) issued media releases protesting changes to drug and supplementary health programs for Alberta seniors. These statements, which include allegations that the government is cutting seniors benefits, are inaccurate. I would like to correct the record. At no time have we indicated we would cut benefits, and to suggest so is misleading.*

*"In Budget 2013, the Government of Alberta signaled it would move to consolidate the 18 current drug and supplementary benefit programs to a single plan. The purpose of this initiative is not to cut benefits or costs as has been suggested. Our goals are clear: to provide access to the approximately 20 per cent of Albertans who currently have no drug or benefit coverage, and to ensure our province can continue to provide the broadest possible range of drugs and other supplemental benefits to Albertans today, and for generations to come.*

*"In the months following Budget 2013, a number of stakeholder groups contacted my ministry and MLA colleagues requesting that more time be allocated for consultation prior to implementing a new plan. In November, I indicated publicly that implementation of a new plan would be deferred from the original date of January 1, 2014. This will allow the opportunity for further consultation and discussion and ensure any proposed changes consider the perspectives of all who have an interest in ensuring we can continue to provide the benefits valued so highly to our growing population. To suggest that any changes are imminent or that there is a hidden plan to move ahead with implementation of changes is simply not accurate," the statement continued.*

*"Yesterday, a small number of people, including representatives from the PIA and FOM advocacy groups occupied my constituency office in Edmonton to demand a meeting with myself and Premier Redford to discuss their concerns. I offered, both through my staff and personally by telephone, a number of options for meeting dates and look forward to a response to that offer.*

*"When my office closed at 4:30 the group was politely asked to leave and the request was repeated several times during the course of the evening. At 12:30 a.m. the group left peacefully and respectfully, allowing my staff to finally return home to their families."*