

## Alison Redford – Responses to PIA Seniors Task Force Survey

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**3. Can you/your party assure us that you will maintain a universal seniors prescription drug plan at least as good as the current plan and will not propose replacing it with a means-tested plan?**

**Background: In December 2008, the then Minister of Health announced a Pharmaceutical Strategy to replace the current universal seniors drug plan with a plan in which coverage was limited to costs beyond a percentage of taxable income. This plan was later modified in response to senior's protests to another means tested plan scheduled for implementation on July 1, 2010. In the spring of 2010, the current Minister of Health announced the implementation of this plan was being delayed and the current universal seniors drug plan would continue.**

Yes

I am committed to making sure that low and middle-income seniors can obtain medication without being forced into financial distress.

**4. Would you/your party support improved access to medications for seniors? Background: Very few new drugs are covered under the Seniors Drug Benefit Program. Canada and particularly Alberta are low on the list for access to new drugs. The cumbersome system for assessing new drugs on the basis of cost effectiveness means that some patients get new drugs, others don't. This is not "Putting Patients First."**

Yes

I want Alberta's seniors to enjoy the highest quality of life possible. Part of this involves ensuring that they can get timely access to the medication they need to deal with chronic and debilitating conditions.

**5. Will you/your party recognize that the nursing and personal care required by seniors who are medically assessed as requiring long-term (Nursing Home) care are **MEDICALLY NECESSARY** services and should be fully covered by Alberta's health care system? Background: Seniors helped build and for many years in Alberta helped support the health care system with health care fees. Now, in their declining years, many who have been medically assessed as requiring long-term care are, because of the shortage of nursing home beds, being forced into supportive and assisted living facilities where, in addition to fees for meals and accommodation, they are having to pay not only for their medications, but also for all of the nursing and personal care they require.**

Yes

Elder care is an essential service. Alberta's seniors spent their working years supporting and expanding the public infrastructure we take for granted. I will not let them spend their last years in poverty, struggling with debt.

**6. Are you/your party prepared to build and operate a sufficient number of long-term care facilities (nursing homes) to accommodate seniors who require that level of care so that such seniors do not have to become a burden on the hospital system while awaiting placement? Background: The shortage of nursing home beds in Alberta is causing social and health problems for seniors and unnecessary costs for the health care system when seniors can't be discharged because there is no place to go. Government claims of the increased number of Continuing Care beds relates mostly to Supportive and Assisted living beds that do not provide the required level of care.**

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I will increase funding for continuing care, revamp regulations and provide incentives so facility operators (both private and non-profit) can economically provide more beds and offer seniors the living arrangements best suited to their lifestyle. On my watch, seniors will not be shuffled between facilities and married couples will be kept together. To further reduce the burden on hospitals, I will expand the array of medical services available at continuing care facilities, saving seniors wherever possible from stressful hospital stays and freeing up acute care spaces.

**7. Will you/your party maintain a regulated and affordable accommodation rate for all long-term care facilities? Background: The Alberta government has always set the fees for meals and accommodation in long-term care facilities. These fees have increased by about 90% in the past decade. However, in 2009, a committee was established to examine the privatization of such facilities and the deregulation of fees.**

Yes

While I intend to loosen caps on housing costs at care facilities, I will absolutely create a quota system to guarantee that low and middle-income seniors can live in them comfortably and affordably.

**8. Would you increase support for publicly-funded and delivered Home Care programs for frail and needy seniors who are medically assessed as requiring such assistance. Background: The Home Care program in Alberta is fragmented and inadequate to meet the needs of many seniors and the objectives of the “Aging in Place” policy. Most seniors want to remain in their own homes but are driven out by the shortcomings of the current Home Care program. Other provinces and other countries have programs much superior to those in Alberta.**

Yes

Allowing seniors to remain in their own homes is key to keeping them healthy as long as possible. I will fund expanded home-care services and work with post-secondary institutions to make sure they produce enough qualified graduates to care for Alberta's growing senior population.

**9. Are you/your party prepared to put an end to converting long-term care facilities into assisted living in order to off-load care costs, or reclassifying long-term care facilities as auxiliary hospitals in order to circumvent the requirements of the Nursing Home Act? Background: In Hinton, Pincher Creek and numerous other locations in the province, the Alberta government has paid the operators to downgrade long-term care facilities to assisted living. Where this has happened, the nursing staff has been eliminated, residents have had to buy the beds and furniture in their room, and have had to start paying for the nursing and personal care they require.**

Yes

More and more Albertans are entering their golden years and it's critical for the government to provide enough long-term care facilities to meet expected demand.

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**10. Are you/your party prepared to establish a Seniors Advocate as an officer of the Legislature with authority to monitor and report on the state of seniors care in Alberta? Background: Because seniors care comes under so many different government departments, it needs to be overseen by an officer who reports to the legislature independent of any individual minister. Seniors groups have been pressing this proposal for the past five years.**

No

Drawing on my experience as head of the multi-ministry Alberta Safe Communities Secretariat, I will break down barriers between departments and ministries to reduce waste and duplication. This is the best way to ensure that senior care issues get the attention they deserve. I strongly believe that ministries must closely coordinate their efforts to provide Albertans with strong public services.

**11. Are you/your party prepared to require all seniors care facilities to establish a democratically elected patient-family council in all publicly supported seniors care facilities with access to all patient complaints and authority to report unsatisfactory conditions to the Independent Seniors Advocate? Background: About 25 years ago, the government mandated all schools to establish School Councils with majority representation for parents and the community. These School Councils have subsequently made schools more responsive to the needs of students, parents and the community. Seniors care facilities could benefit in the same way.**

Yes

It's very important for seniors and their families to have a voice to inform the government of unsatisfactory conditions. Seniors deserve the best we can give them.

**12. Would you be willing to meet with seniors groups to explore new ways to do a better job of listening to the concerns of seniors and the general public about seniors care issues?**

Yes

People know more than government ever will about conditions on the ground. The government must consult with members of the public to properly serve them.

**13. Would you be willing to increase revenue for the provincial government so that increased investments can be made to public services for seniors? Background: More public investments need to be made to address the current lack of quality and access to seniors care and the projected increase in the number of seniors. The Premier's Council for Economic Strategy recently released a report recommending a review of the tax structures to ensure that we are paying for our social programs and saving resource revenue for investment that will benefit future Albertans.**

No

Existing revenues are adequate and I do not see any need to raise taxes. By keeping Alberta's economy healthy and growing, we will be able to recoup enough to maintain efficient and responsive services for seniors even as their share of the population increases.