

Social Policy Renewal Health

Western Premiers' Conference
Drumheller, Alberta
May, 1999

Highlight of Premiers' Discussion

Introduction

- Key to the future of Western Canada is a vibrant economy in which westerners prosper.
- Prosperity goes hand-in-hand with health: one cannot be achieved without the other.
- Planning for a healthy population is crucial to the economic future of the West.
- This presentation is intended to promote discussion of the challenges and opportunities that are front and centre for the health care systems in the western provinces and territories today.

Context

The challenges and opportunities for the health systems occur in the overall context of:

- The Social Union Framework Agreement
- CHST re-investments
- Increasing public expectations and professional demands
- Changing economic conditions
- The evolving health system environment

The Evolving Health System Environment

- Shifting from institutional treatment to community-based care
- Building the capacity and sustainability of quality health care
- Achieving a better balance between prevention and treatment
- Increasing accountability for outcomes, not inputs
- Dealing with critical issues

Critical Issues

- Demographic trends
- Social and economic determinants of health
- Disparities in health status
- Cost drivers
- Technological changes
- Public concerns about the health system
- Federal unilateralism

Demographic Trends

- Aging population, with increasing demand for services
- Declining birth rates
- Declining proportion of the population in the workforce to support public health costs
- Rapidly growing, and very young Aboriginal populations
- Differential impacts of immigration on provinces/territories

Determinants of Health

- Income and social disparities
- Social support networks
- Education levels
- Employment and working conditions
- Physical environments
- Biology
- Healthy lifestyles and coping skills
- Housing conditions
- Health services

Disparities in Health Status

- Urban versus rural service availability
- Urban versus rural cost factors
- North/south disparities
- Needs within Aboriginal populations
- Special needs populations

Cost Drivers

- Proliferating treatments, drugs and services
- Heightened public expectations
- New, more expensive technologies and specialization
- Health workforce - supply and income pressures
- Aging population with increased life expectancy
- Increased survival rates for people with chronic disease (newborn and elderly)
- Emphasis on new technology at the potential expense of prevention

Challenges and Opportunities

- Investing resources to meet anticipated needs, focussing on outcomes
- Balancing priorities between prevention and treatment
- Applying early intervention strategies to improve the health of children and youth
- Increasing the capacity of families and communities to meet their own health needs
- Addressing public expectations

Next Steps

Western Premiers affirm their commitment to working together to sustain an affordable, high quality health system, and accordingly direct Health Ministers to explore opportunities for:

- Collaborating on the creation of a western health information network
- Co-operating within federal-provincial-territorial responsibilities to improve the health status of Aboriginal people
- Consolidating actions to resolve health human resource issues