

Creating Synergy

HEALTH COALITION OF ALBERTA

Executive Summary: Position Statements Regarding Alberta's Drug Program Act (2009)

July 2009

The Issues Facing Albertans

- The Drug Program Act was approved and received Royal Assent on June 4, 2009. The Act is vague and leaves open the possibility of having regulations which will be focused primarily on reducing healthcare services and access to drugs to decrease health care and drug expenditures.
- With some of the decisions already made, there is more indication that the government has more consideration for reducing health and drug expenditures and less regard for the health and wellbeing of Albertans or for improving their health outcomes. This is worrisome!
- Albertans are not being consulted or engaged on health care decisions that could compromise patient safety and have devastating outcomes.
- Cost pressures are impacting on formulary management.
- Cost-containment strategies such as bulk-buying, sole-tendering and reference-based pricing including generic or therapeutic substitution may save money in one area but limit choice for patients and their doctors, pose potential threats to patient safety and health outcomes and increase costs in other areas of the healthcare system.
- Pharmaceutical costs appear to be targeted in isolation from overall healthcare costs or outcomes.
- Drug review and approval in Alberta is complicated, delays access to new safe and effective treatments, lacks transparency, is not open to patient or public consultation or engagement, and does not account for decisions.
- Recent drug approval decisions have disregarded clinical practice guidelines, limited treatment options and appeared to put cost concerns ahead of health outcomes.

The Coalition's Position Statements on the Issues

Position Statement 1:

A new Alberta Pharmaceuticals Strategy is needed as is a Drug Program Act – but they must put the health interests of Albertans first, and be developed and implemented in an open and transparent manner. This includes meaningful public engagement which takes doctors' recommendations for disease treatment into account. This is all about achieving best practices and the best opportunities for positive health outcomes!

Position Statement 2:

We need to consider the value and therapeutic benefits of medicines in the context of total

healthcare costs. Pharmaceuticals should be seen as a strategic investment in better patient outcomes.

Position Statement 3:

Alberta can learn from recent negative experiences and application of cost containment measures in other jurisdictions, including negative outcomes related to therapeutic and generic substitution. There is an opportunity to become a world leader in embracing new approaches for holistic decision making and health outcomes in the long term, and at the same time be conscientious of keeping drug and healthcare costs down.

Position Statement 4:

Consider other cost solutions than cost containment such as –

- Economic evaluation of pharmaceuticals within the larger context of the healthcare system
- Health promotion campaigns on more effective use of medicine, disease prevention and management
- Enhanced roles for pharmacists and other health care professionals in front-line interaction with patients
- Investigation of opportunities for cost management that does not directly impact health outcome – for example, negotiating the reduction of brand and generic drug prices.

Position Statement 5:

We support a review and restructuring of Alberta’s Expert Drug Review Committee and the parallel development of an independent Citizens’ Council, which could include:

- Meaningful patient participation in the drug review and societal values process
- Meaningful disease-expert (clinical and experience) participation in the review process
- Open and transparent decisions
- Accountability for decisions
- Shortened timelines for decision-making
- Separate or special review of drugs for rare disorders
- Increased access to new safe and more effective therapies.

Our Recommendations

With a stated provincial government objective of developing and implementing a new pharmaceuticals strategy and drug program, we see this as an opportunity to get it right the first time.

Patients and Albertans generally, are becoming more interested in, and more critical of the processes used by decision-makers to decide on health services, technologies, service and product reviews, formulary listings and access, coverage plans and health policies. Government should take advantage of this interest and have health stakeholders, including patients and the public, play a more significant role in discussing and deciding on health care initiatives and health policy decisions that impact them on a daily basis. This proactive approach could be seen as innovative and preventative of any negative or harmful consequences that otherwise could result from health care service and program cuts.