

January 11, 2007

Premier Ed Stelmach
307 Legislature Building
10800 97 Avenue
Edmonton, AB
Canada T5K 2B6

Honourable Dave Hancock
Minister of Health and Wellness
#224 Legislature Building
10800 97 Ave
Edmonton, AB
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Sirs:

Your promises for a “focus on listening to Albertans and meeting their priorities”, and “to improve Albertan’s quality of life” reflects a personal interest in ensuring our most vulnerable citizens in care experience a better safer life, and we are writing to you with the hope that you are prepared to fully understand and address the serious and persistent deficiencies within our continuing care system.

We have had many years of personal experience with this system; we have spent years documenting the testimonies of families from across the province in order to determine the nature and extent of systemic problems within Alberta’s continuing care sector; tracking and recording abuse statistics issued by Protection for Persons in Care since 1998; conducting literature reviews to understand why harmful conditions within residential settings exist and what could be done to rectify them; drawing government’s attention to where the system is breaking down and making recommendations for change and improvement. In 2003, we were members a group of citizens who made a submission to the Auditor General to request an audit of the continuing care system.

The previous Government responded to the 2005 Auditor General’s Report on Seniors Care and Services and the MLA Task Force findings to address some of the administrative issues affecting seniors’ care. But neither initiative addressed the quality, appropriateness or adequacy of the nursing and health/medical care being provided in the facilities, or acknowledged the concerns of the primary stakeholders – the recipients of continuing care services and their families.

Our recent report, [An Inside Look at the Continuing Care Experience in Alberta, 2006](#), prepared from family accounts of their experience submitted to our website (<http://www.continuingcarewatch.com/>) illustrates that the same deficiencies we noted in 2003 (in submissions to the Auditor General and the Government) continue to harm residents or place them at risk of serious injury or preventable death.

We would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you to discuss how the problems in continuing care in Alberta might be addressed by your government, and to share with you our knowledge of successful initiatives of other jurisdictions.

Sincerely,

Carol Wodak

Bev McKay

Attachments:

- Submission to the Standing Policy Committee on Health and Community Living, 2003
- Submission to the Alberta Auditor General, 2003
- [An Inside Look at the Continuing Care Experience in Alberta, 2006](#)

March 20, 2007

Dear Ms. Wodak:

Thank you for your January 11, 2007 letter and attachments regarding Alberta's continuing care system. I appreciate the opportunity to respond on behalf of the Government of Alberta.

You expressed concerns with the quality of care in Alberta's continuing care system and that recent government initiatives have not addressed the issues. Please be assured that the continuing care system remains a priority for this government. My department has been working closely with the Ministry of Seniors and Community Supports and the nine regional health authorities (RHAs) on a number of initiatives to improve quality and safety in the continuing care system.

It is clear that you are familiar with the MLA Task Force on Continuing Care, and their recommendations. In response, government has taken action to improve quality of care through the release of new Continuing Care Standards in May, 2006. My department is working closely with the RHAs towards the full implementation of these standards by April, 2007.

The new health service standards offer an enhanced role for the client and their family in an individual's assessment and care planning; improved monitoring and reporting processes by RHAs and Alberta Health and Wellness; and recognition of wellness initiatives that focus on maintaining and improving the health of continuing care clients. The standards also require that all health care aides providing continuing care services, including home care, be trained to meet a set of provincial core competencies.

Work has also been done to address staffing concerns. In each of the last two fiscal years, Alberta Health and Wellness has directed funding to RHAs specifically for increasing paid hours of nursing and personal care staffing in long-term care facilities. Additional funding has also been allocated for the RHAs to increase capacity for therapy, clinical specialists, clinical pharmacists, and case management coordinators.

Increasing funding is only part of the strategy. My department is also working on a number of health workforce initiatives to increase the availability of health care providers. For example, a Health Care Aide Awareness Strategy is being designed to attract individuals to employment opportunities as health care aides.

In terms of enhancing safety, government has provided funding for the purchase of safe lifting equipment, a medication management review, and implementation of new care planning and assessment tools, as well as the necessary infrastructure to support it.

I am confident that as we move forward, these new standards, combined with current initiatives, will result in real improvements to quality of care and life for all continuing care clients in Alberta.

Yours truly,

Dave Hancock, Q.C.
Minister

cc: Honourable Ed Stelmach, Premier