

Healthcare in Alberta

What would the ideal system look like?

The World Health Organization has defined people-centred care as “an approach to care that consciously adopts the perspectives of individuals, caregivers, families and communities as participants in, and beneficiaries of, trusted health systems that are organized around the comprehensive needs of people rather than individual diseases.” And Alberta Health Services lists “patient- and family-centred care” as one of their four “foundational pillars.” So what does this mean to Albertans? What is the current experience for Albertans using the healthcare system, and what would a more people-centred system look like?

IMAGINE Citizens has spoken with Albertans over the last couple of years to find out what matters to you regarding your health, safety, and care within our healthcare system.

As you read through this statement, think about whether we have captured the things that are important to you or your family.

We will continue to meet and talk with Albertans. As more of you tell us what matters to you, we'll regularly revisit and revise this statement so that it reflects your current feedback.

Please read on and tell us what YOU think.

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We'd love to hear from you.

Easy to navigate.

In a people-centred healthcare system, regular people find their way around, starting with where to go to get an accurate diagnosis as quickly as possible. There is clear information about how to access different kinds of services, including where to go if necessary services are not available in Alberta or within Canada; easy tracking of referrals and test results; and knowledge about whom to call for information or follow-up. There would still be a need for “navigators” to support patients and families with complex diagnoses, treatments, or multiple specialists.

An Albertan living in a rural community described challenges with care related to a serious back problem requiring surgery:

We received numerous calls for appointments and tests from specialists in Calgary and Red Deer, and we were never sure if they were for duplicate tests and appointments, and had no way of confirming it. We ended up getting some things done twice.

Everything needs to come through one central point, for example, the family doctor’s office. They need to keep it together. This would be less confusing for the patient – better communication flow between the family physician, the patient and other services or specialists.

Convenient, user-friendly services.

In a people-centred healthcare system, people are easily able to integrate needed healthcare services into their everyday lives. Whenever possible, services come to the person rather than the person having to travel to services. This is facilitated by: having services located in local communities where possible; using telehealth and other emerging technology for accessing services such as consultations with specialists; allowing health professionals to do everything they are trained to do; creating a one-stop approach by locating services under one roof and coordinating multiple appointments; and providing choice around appointment times. This is particularly important for people who are living with long-term health issues and have ongoing interaction with the healthcare system.

An Albertan living in a remote community described a positive experience with cancer care:

My family doctor was excellent and, once I had been diagnosed with cancer, gave me the choice of seeing a doctor in my community or Edmonton. I was provided with options, and was able to meet with the Edmonton doctor first by video-conference. I then had surgery in Edmonton in a timely manner. There was good communication between all the doctors, and with my family doctor. **It’s all commonplace to them. But it’s uncommon to me and they made me feel super.**

Integrated and consistent.

A people-centred healthcare system is experienced as coordinated and connected. There is good communication between healthcare professionals and health organizations. People do not have to give their health history repeatedly. People are truly viewed as being at the centre of the system, with services designed with people to continuously meet their physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual needs. The quality of care provided is high no matter where the patient is, and each healthcare service and organization has the same standards and rules. Care across the lifespan is experienced as a connected series of events, whether individual services are publicly or privately funded. Transportation to needed healthcare services is considered to be part of this connected system.

An Albertan described two completely different experiences with care for a life-threatening infection following major abdominal surgery, all within the same big city hospital:

I was in a very vulnerable situation. I was in a room with four patients and could not help myself. I could not get assistance to keep myself clean or get washed. It didn't matter how many times I asked for help. After emergency surgery and an ICU stay, I was discharged back to the same floor of the same hospital – but on the other side of the hallway. The care there was fabulous. They asked when I wanted my shower. The nursing assistant was always checking the rooms to see if anyone needed anything, and the staff were always communicating with each other. When I got home, I got a call right away, and had homecare the next day. **If people feel like they have to fight, they can't heal.**

Information is accessible.

In a people-centred healthcare system, people have the information they need to be a partner in their care. There is a good balance between concerns for privacy and the need for patients to be able to easily access their health records online. This access will make it easier to share information with other health providers – including when there is a need to obtain care in another jurisdiction or to obtain a second opinion. People can give permission for family members to access their health records. In this healthcare system, there are lots of opportunities for people to learn about their upcoming tests and procedures, as well as about their health more broadly. This healthcare system is transparent about the performance of services and the quality of care they provide. People use this information to make informed choices about where to go for care. People know who is in charge, so that they know where to go if they are experiencing difficulties with a service or organization.

An Albertan took initiative to make sure necessary information was made available:

My mother was in continuing care, and my father had not asked questions on behalf of his wife because he did not want to “rock the boat.” But there were many unanswered questions and concerns. After hard work and consulting directly with all the key organizations involved, we are excited now to have a three-way partnership with Alberta Health Services, the care facility, and the community. **You need three legs on the stool.** We worked to develop a simple manual for patients and families with answers to questions and resources for those who need them in the system. AHS now has a goal to use the same model, and put it in place for every facility.

People's insights, knowledge, and humanity are valued.

In a people-centred healthcare system, the knowledge people possess about their own health and healthcare experience is recognized as valuable, and actively sought out. Compassion is central to the experience. Healthcare providers introduce themselves to patients, and encourage them to ask questions. Patients and their families are valued and respected as members of the healthcare team, and are invited to document their observations in their health record. Families are not thought of as “visitors” in healthcare facilities, but as partners in care. At a system level, local knowledge, understanding, and experience is valued; people and communities are actively involved in working with health professionals and healthcare organizations to co-design healthcare services and systems.

An Albertan living in a remote community described a positive experience with a child who had serious heart issues requiring many surgeries:

A lot of tape is required to hold a child's IV in. Many nurses just rip the tape off quickly, but this can be painful and scary for children. We had one nurse who spent a half-hour slowly taking off the tape, so as to decrease the fear and pain for the child. You need healthcare providers who care. **Front line workers can make or break a hospital experience.**

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“Often, our approach to involving the patient, although well-intentioned, is flawed by a failure to accept the patient as an equal partner... that is, physicians are experts in disease and patients are experts in their own experience of disease and in their preferences.

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W. Wayne Weston, Canadian physician (2001)

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Who is IMAGINE Citizens Collaborating for Health?

IMAGINE is a citizen-led initiative and social movement focused on engaging Albertans while bringing health organizations, providers, policy makers and patients together to design an integrated, people-centred healthcare system. We have received support from various sources: Health Quality Council of Alberta, O'Brien Institute for Public Health, Alberta Innovates Health Solutions, and several private donors. The O'Brien Institute for Public Health at the University of Calgary provides an administrative home for our activities.

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IMAGINE
CITIZENS Collaborating
for Health

What is your vision of the ideal system?

Help us refine ours and get involved in the work.

Find more information on our website www.imaginecitizens.ca

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We **IMAGINE** a better health system. As Albertans, let's work together to make it happen.