

Brief to the Government of Alberta  
by the United Nurses of Alberta on a

# Social Policy Framework for Alberta

July 2012

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## Summary

United Nurses of Alberta, which represents more than 25,000 Registered Nurses and Registered Psychiatric Nurses in Alberta, proposes this broad outline for a new Alberta Social Policy Framework in response to the Government's Working Paper on Social Policy.

UNA argues in this submission that as a general *principle*, all social policy legislation, regulation and public programs in Alberta should be drafted with their impact on the health of all

Albertans in mind. This means considering and acting on the *determinants of health* in all policy goals, not merely responding to specific health issues as they arise.

UNA also proposes eight specific policy *strategies* that will foster the general *outcomes* of improved health and security for all Albertans, with consequential improvements in productivity, prosperity, democracy and long-term health.

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## Fundamental Principles

UNA believes above all in the principle of universal access to comprehensive public health care at all stages of life. We believe the Alberta health care system cannot be preserved without secure and predictable funding. UNA believes the Alberta Government must integrate the

health and wellness of the entire population into all policies. Furthermore, UNA urges the Government to embark on strategic investments that will improve factors that determine health with a particular focus on impacts of poverty, inadequate housing, food insecurity, social inclusion and education.

## Policy Recommendations

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With these fundamental principles in mind, UNA makes the following specific recommendations:

- **Bring long-term care into the provincial public health system.** By bringing long-term care fully into the provincial public health system, we will improve the quality of life of our elders and save money for taxpayers through the increased efficiencies and higher quality of the non-profit public health care sector.
- **Introduce an Alberta “Pharmacare” program.** It is self-evident pharmaceutical care is an essential part of many treatment programs, yet pharmaceutical costs continue to grow at a disturbing pace. A provincial Pharmacare program can introduce true universal access to effective medical treatment and save taxpayers millions of dollars.
- **Resist U.S.-style health care privatization.** An accessible, fair public health care system is incompatible with private, for-profit health care delivery. Private health care delivery cannot reduce costs, relieve pressure on facilities or improve care.
- **Ensure stable and appropriate funding for health and social services.** UNA commends the Alberta Government for its efforts to assure stable and predictable funding for health care and social services. UNA encourages the Government to continue and expand these progressive policies.
- **Implement primary care for all Albertans within a meaningful time frame.** The Canadian Nurses Association recommends implementation of primary health care for all by merging health care and social service workers into multi-disciplinary teams working in consultation with citizens they serve by 2017. UNA recommends Alberta take the lead through the mechanism of Family Care Clinics and set an example for the nation in this implementation.
- **Be mindful of the need for training.** The shortage of skilled health care and social service providers in Alberta and the world is well known. Alberta should lead the way in a meaningful time frame for providing new training opportunities to fill these gaps.
- **Invest in improving the determinants of health.** The factors that are likely to determine good health, and therefore lower the costs of health care, are well known. Alberta needs to target investment on eliminating poverty, providing educational opportunity, ensuring proper housing, social inclusion and guaranteeing adequate food and clean water for all. This includes paying particular attention to parts of society at risk of falling behind.
- **Make health part of the planning process for legislation, regulation and policy.** A process must be put in place to assess each new law, regulation, policy and program for its impact on overall health before introduction. A process is also needed for reviewing existing law and policy over time with the same objective.