The Role of the British Columbia Government in Health Care

Report Card—May 2017

This report card reflects current performance but is a living document. When the British Columbia government’s performance in an area changes, we will alter that area’s spotlight in future reports.
From coast to coast to coast, everyone living in Canada should have access to the same high level of health care. As guided by the Canada Health Act, provinces and territories are responsible for delivering health care services, with the mandate to ensure equitable care across the country. However, needs, demographics, and resource availability vary across Canada.

It is up to provincial and territorial governments to provide their communities with accessible care that is comprehensive, proactive, and timely.

The Government of British Columbia must ensure that its health care system has continuous support, strategic direction, and a commitment to improvement that goes beyond just meeting the current needs of British Columbians. The government has a responsibility to:

• Establish provincial standards of care
• Create provincial programs that meet the diverse needs of British Columbians
• Provide adequate funding to programs and providers who develop and deliver our care

As the voice for family medicine in British Columbia, the British Columbia College of Family Physicians (BCCFP) strives to ensure that the government delivers on its responsibility to maintain a strong health care system. This report card provides voters in British Columbia with an assessment of the current/prospective government’s performance in health care, and evaluates the policy platforms of various provincial parties released in advance of the election.

The document focuses on five areas that are of crucial importance to British Columbians’ health:

1. A family doctor for every British Columbian
2. Mental health and addiction
3. Indigenous health
4. Rural and remote care
5. Support for the Patient’s Medical Home (PMH)

The report card is divided into two sections:

• An evaluation of the current government’s progress in these five areas
• An evaluation of the health care platforms of the three main political parties participating in this election—the BC Green Party (BC Greens), the BC Liberal Party (BC Liberals), and the BC New Democratic Party (BC NDP)—and what the election of each would mean for health care in British Columbia

Spotlights are used to grade the performance of the current/prospective government:

GREEN
• A green grade shows that the current/prospective government demonstrates strong leadership; we encourage an ongoing commitment in these areas.

YELLOW
• A yellow grade shows that the current/prospective government is somewhat involved, but could do even more. It may also indicate a high-level commitment to an area that lacks implementation details.

RED
• A red grade indicates that the current/prospective government has shown no involvement. These red areas need attention now. A red grade is a call to action!

In 2017, here is how the British Columbia government is performing in the five key areas...
Current Government Performance

Here is how the government performed in the following five areas of health care:

1. A family doctor for every British Columbian

Building on the 2010 Attachment Initiative, the Government of British Columbia and Doctors of BC, through the General Practice Services Committee (GPSC), started the province-wide A GP for Me initiative in 2013. The program objectives were to strengthen service delivery, ensure patients are full participants in their own care, and provide a family doctor for every British Columbian who wants one.

As of September 2016, A GP for Me has brought 416 new doctors to British Columbia communities; attached 178,000 people to a doctor, including previously unattached vulnerable patients; and prevented over 130,000 patients from becoming unattached by transferring them from a retiring or relocating doctor to a new doctor. Although this a good start, the BCCFP would like to see further progress, with broader PMH implementation.

2. Mental health and addiction

The Tele-Mental Health partnership, the Virtual Care strategy, and additional substance abuse treatments and bed spaces are just a few of the key initiatives the government has implemented to address mental health and addiction issues in British Columbia. The Child Youth Mental Health initiative has had a meaningful impact in the past five years, and is a good model of team-based care. However, the BCCFP would like to see additional support for mental health through PMH integration and more action to address the opioid crisis.

3. Indigenous health

Although the government has made some progress in supporting more appropriate clinical services and health promotion initiatives for the Indigenous population in British Columbia, including partnering with the first province-wide First Nations Health Authority, more action needs to be taken. The BCCFP would like the government to focus on Indigenous health in rural and urban communities, and address province-wide physical and mental health disparities that continue to exist. It will also be important to ensure that the new models of primary care can operate within the context of on-reserve band-delivered services and nursing stations, and ensure that these services benefit from enhanced access to the services (primary care homes) off-reserve via integration and collaboration.

4. Rural and remote care

The government supports physician recruitment and retention through initiatives, such as the Joint Standing Committee on Rural Issues, the Practice Ready Assessment-BC program, grants, community paramedicine, and infrastructure projects. However, greater support is required for communities that are struggling to recruit physicians to service their health care needs. Many rural communities are still vulnerable, especially regarding surgery and maternity care. The BCCFP looks forward to seeing how the elements of the PMH are further integrated with developing initiatives that target rural and remote communities, and how innovations in virtual care can be implemented to improve local access.

5. Support for the Patient’s Medical Home (PMH)

The PMH serves as a central hub for accessible and compassionate patient-centred care, as a foundation for ongoing practice-based research, and as an inspiration for physicians of the future through hands-on training.

The British Columbia government embraced the PMH concept in 2015, and the work to roll out PMHs is being led by the GPSC. While it is still early in the implementation phase, resources and services are being designed at the local level, based on population and patient needs, and focused on providing timely, responsive, and patient-centred access to appropriate services close to home. Services provided to practices include panel identification, clean-up and management tools, EMR functionality, and PMH practice assessment tools. In April 2017, the government announced $90 million in new funding over three years to bring integrated team-based primary care services to more communities throughout British Columbia.

The BCCFP looks forward to seeing continued support for implementing PMHs across the province, and additional support for the evolution of current practices toward team-based care, delivering services based on population and patient needs within an integrated system of primary and community care.
Election Platforms

We sent a questionnaire to the larger provincial parties, asking for feedback about how their party platforms address our health indicators. This section reflects our evaluation of their publically available platforms, as well as any responses received from the parties.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>BC Greens</th>
<th>BC Liberals</th>
<th>BC NDP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A family doctor for every British Columbian</td>
<td>☢ GREEN</td>
<td>☢ YELLOW</td>
<td>☢ YELLOW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health and addiction</td>
<td>☢ GREEN</td>
<td>☢ GREEN</td>
<td>☢ GREEN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous health</td>
<td>☢ YELLOW</td>
<td>☢ YELLOW</td>
<td>☢ YELLOW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural and remote care</td>
<td>☢ YELLOW</td>
<td>☢ YELLOW</td>
<td>☢ YELLOW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support for the Patient’s Medical Home (PMH)</td>
<td>☢ GREEN</td>
<td>☢ YELLOW</td>
<td>☢ YELLOW</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* This section contains information from the publically available party platform documents. For details, see the BC Greens’ Change You Can Count On, the BC Liberals’ Strong BC, Bright Future, and the BC NDP’s Working For You: Our commitments to build a better BC.
Mental health and addiction

**BC Greens**

The BC Greens will allocate $80 million to fund early interventions, youth mental health initiatives, supervised injection sites, and community-based centres for mental health and rehabilitation, and will redirect funding to address the fentanyl crisis.

**BC Liberals**

The BC Liberals have set $165 million to address youth mental health needs and substance abuse issues, including mental health counselling and treatment for children, specialized addiction treatment beds for youth, and reducing wait lists for substance abuse treatment services. The party also plans to launch five integrated youth service centres, and fund an additional 250 mental health and problematic substance use beds by 2022.

**BC NDP**

The BC NDP plan to create a Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions to prioritize mental health patients, and ensure that treatment is available, coordinated, and effective for everyone who needs it. This new ministry will work with the Ministry of Children and Families, the Ministry of Health, local governments, First Nations, and the education and justice systems. The party will allocate $45 million to increase support for mental health and addiction issues. The party aims to provide access to a wide range of evidence-based and regulated treatments, including licensing the current recovery house system, enhancing post-detox supports, and improving access to harm reduction options.

All parties should consider a stronger focus on early intervention, prevention, and mental wellness promotion. The BCCFP also recommends that centres and/or facilities be supported by appropriate community infrastructure, so that they are well integrated into community practices rather than creating additional silos.

Indigenous health

**BC Greens**

The BC Greens acknowledge that health of Indigenous people is a particular priority that requires attention throughout the health spectrum. The party notes that many Indigenous people live in poverty, are marginalized from society, and face daily threats to their well-being. As part of a comprehensive anti-poverty strategy, the BC Greens will identify strategies to address all aspects of child poverty in the province, including specific actions to address poverty affecting Indigenous children and families.

The BCCFP would like to see more details about what will be done to address these issues. We commend the BC Greens for recognizing poverty as a root determinant of health and encourage them to include all social determinants of health as a focus.

**BC Liberals**

The BC Liberals have committed to continue working to improve health outcomes by ensuring that accessible and culturally appropriate health care is available to the Indigenous population. The party is committed to responding to the recommendations made in the report, *Indigenous resilience, connectedness and reunification— from root causes to root solutions*, which focuses on Indigenous child welfare in British Columbia. With respect to addictions and mental health, the party plans to provide $1.5 million of new funding over three years through the First Nations Health Authority (FNHA), which will be dedicated to establishing an additional Aboriginal Suicide and Critical Incident Response Team. This funding will also support the FNHA to enhance land-based and culturally safe substance-use treatment for First Nations communities.

**BC NDP**

The BC NDP will implement the recommendations made in the report, *Indigenous resilience, connectedness and reunification— from root causes to root solutions*. The party plans to establish a special initiative with First Nations leaders and their communities to provide additional assistance where the impact of the overdose crisis is greatest. The platform includes a promise to resolve outstanding treaty issues by using the United Nation’s Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as a guide for legislation and policy development.
Rural and remote care

**BC Greens**  
Grade: **YELLOW**  
The BC Greens support comprehensive and accessible health care for all British Columbians in all regions, publicly funded through progressive taxation. As part of the $100 million investment to enhance child protective services, some funding will be allocated to incentivize social workers to work in rural and underserved regions. Incentives are a small part of the health care provider distribution issues facing British Columbia’s rural and remote communities.

The BCCFP recommends a review of both the care and remuneration models within these communities.

**BC Liberals**  
Grade: **YELLOW**  
Along with implementing a Ministerial Task Force on Expanded Scope of Practice, the BC Liberals have identified the need to increase the number of medical professionals in rural British Columbia. One method of achieving this is by identifying retention programs to ensure that health care providers remain in rural and northern communities, including rural palliative care professionals. The party plans to expand the Practice Ready Assessment-BC program, which fast-tracks international physicians into clinical practice in rural communities. The BC Liberals aim to train more doctors, and work with Health Match BC to encourage doctors to work in rural and remote areas of the province.

The BCCFP does not believe that expanding scopes of practice offers a sustainable solution, and recommends a review of practice models and resource allocation for rural and remote communities.

**BC NDP**  
Grade: **YELLOW**  
The BC NDP plan to invest in improving rural health services, and in creating local solutions. The party plans to expand travel assistance coverage for patients in rural and remote communities. They want to ensure that vulnerable patients from remote communities have the most direct and sensible access to treatment by equalizing the coverage provided for ferries and commercial flights. A total of $12 million is being dedicated to travel assistance for the period of 2018/19 to 2019/20. Travel places additional risk on patients and increases the stresses associated with being away from their community.

The BCCFP would prefer to see dollars directed at developing innovative care models and technology to support care and allow patients to receive care within their own communities. Travel places additional risk on patients and increases the stresses associated with being away from their community.

Support for the Patient’s Medical Home (PMH)

**BC Greens**  
Grade: **GREEN**  
The BC Greens support a patient-centred health care system that is committed to fairness, local control, and accountability. The BC Greens view effective interprofessional teamwork as an essential component for the delivery of high-quality care. The party will allocate $100 million for expanding interprofessional, integrated primary care. This investment aims to enable patients to benefit from the full scope of knowledge and expertise of qualified health practitioners, reduce the burden on medical practitioners, and reduce wait times for treatment. The party also plans to develop a proposal to implement an essential drugs program to decrease the costs of prescription drugs.

**BC Liberals**  
Grade: **YELLOW**  
The BC Liberals are focusing on prevention, health management, and primary care in a patient’s community, supported by a strong acute and emergency care system. The party has committed $90 million in new funding over three years to bring integrated team-based primary care services to more communities throughout British Columbia. Using electronic health records is also a key component in their e-health strategy. The BC Liberals look to develop and implement a Ministerial Task Force on Expanded Scope of Practice, and work with provincial medical credentialing colleges to expand medical practitioners’ scope of practice to reduce pressure on practitioners, registered nurses, and other in-demand professionals.

The BCCFP does not believe that expanding scope of practice is the solution. Practitioners should be supported to work to a full scope through efficient team-based models of care.

**BC NDP**  
Grade: **YELLOW**  
The BC NDP recognize that team-based primary care helps deliver effective primary care that is comprehensive, coordinated, and continuous. Along with establishing timely access Urgent Family Care Centres across British Columbia, the party aims to reduce the cost of prescription drugs, reduce the demand on acute care and emergency beds by investing in home care and quality long-term care for British Columbia seniors, and implement province-wide coordination to manage and actively monitor wait lists to deliver timely care for patients.
References and additional reading


The College of Family Physicians of Canada Best Advice guides: Resources that provide practical advice for topics such as social determinants of health, patient-centred care, and communities of practice. Guides, summaries, and more are available from: [http://patientsmedicalhome.ca/resources/best-advice-guides/](http://patientsmedicalhome.ca/resources/best-advice-guides/).


Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, [www.trc.ca/](http://www.trc.ca/)
