

Acute care plan highlights: Reducing emergency wait times

Continuing care beds relieves pressure

- There are about 700 Albertans waiting in acute care or sub-acute care settings for a long-term care or supportive living space. Adding more than 3,000 continuing care beds over the next three years will significantly reduce the number of people waiting for placement and the length of time they have to wait.
- As people move into more appropriate facilities, more hospital beds become available, resulting in shorter emergency department wait times as patients move through the system faster.

Other initiatives to reduce emergency wait times include:

Expanded emergency departments

- Calgary's Rockyview General Hospital opened a new 46-bed emergency department with an additional 12-bed medical assessment unit. Patients waiting for an inpatient bed are transferred to this unit, where physicians and nurses initiate consultations, treatment and diagnostics. A second, 15-bed medical assessment unit is expected to open fall 2010 at the Royal Alexandra Hospital in Edmonton. Patients typically stay in a medical assessment unit between 24 and 48 hours.
- Edmonton's University of Alberta Hospital and Stollery Children's Hospital emergency department upgrade began in spring 2010 to expand the pediatric area of emergency by 12 treatment spaces, with a dedicated entrance for ambulatory patients and a separate waiting room and triage/registration desk. Work is expected to be completed in 2011.
- Grande Prairie's QEII Hospital emergency department was built in 1984 to handle 22,000 emergency visits per year; last year it handled almost 50,000 – a quarter of those visits trauma-related. Expected to open the fall of 2011, the expanded department will include an urgent care area and a five-bed unit for patients not requiring admission, as part of 21 monitored beds.

Flow and program improvements

- Staff members at several facilities have initiated new patient flow processes. For example, patients at Alberta Children's Hospital in Calgary are now seeing doctors sooner in a "flow bed" assessment area. These beds have helped the hospital reduce the time for most patients to see a physician by 15 minutes—a 15 per cent improvement.
- At the Northern Lights Regional Health Centre, additional family physicians were hired to reduce the number of patients using emergency services for non-urgent conditions. A new bed utilization co-ordinator is also serving as a liaison between emergency and hospital departments, reducing bottlenecks by streamlining admissions and discharges.

- Seniors are benefitting from new specially trained care co-ordinators who assess elderly emergency department patients to determine if they need community supports, including home care services. This program is designed to help seniors avoid return visits to emergency departments and to help them stay safe, health and independent.
- Emergency Medical Services is piloting a program involving the expansion of the role of the paramedic to include the identification of older, at risk individuals living in the community who would benefit from fall risk screening, home care screening and referral to the appropriate service. The goal is to increase access to community services for at risk seniors as well as appropriate avoidance of patient transfers to the emergency department. This program is being piloted in Calgary, Edmonton, Nanton and Parkland.