

Health care questions for UCP leadership candidates – Leela Aheer

The Alberta Medical Association is seeking to understand each UCP leadership candidate's vision and plan for addressing the challenges in our health care system. We asked our 14,000 members what health care related questions they have for the candidates. We also asked our online patient community – made up of over 40,000 Albertans – at PatientsFirst.ca.

The following 10 questions will be posed to each UCP leadership candidate on behalf of member physicians and Alberta patients:

1. Every Albertan needs a family doctor (supported by a team of health professionals to look after their comprehensive, life-long needs), but many Albertans either cannot find a family doctor, or cannot get in to see theirs. Albertans are worried and want to know what your vision is to improve access to primary care in Alberta?

AHS is coming up on 15 years old, and we need to do a full review and reassessment of the way we administer our Healthcare system. Alberta has more than enough wealth, ingenuity, and capacity to make sure we're delivering the services our citizens need, in models that work for our healthcare professionals. Within my first days as Premier, I want to organize a summit with all the key players within the healthcare system so I can get a clear understanding of what needs to be changed, which needs are urgent and how can we move ahead.

That's why if I'm lucky enough to be chosen as the next leader of the United Conservative Party, I'll be committing to realigning GP compensation to better fit alongside specialists, expanding supports for physician's assistants, and funding the training of more practical nurses so that we can deliver the care Albertans badly need everywhere in the province.

2. Alberta is facing a shortage of all kinds of health care professionals. What would you do as premier to increase our ability to attract and retain the physicians that Albertans need? What do you think will be required:
 - For rural Alberta?
 - For our small and large cities?
 - To attract and retain medical students and resident physicians?

Re-aligning compensation for General Practitioners so that we can retain and attract GPs that Albertans badly need. Providing supports to expand adoption of Physician's Assistants and the education of Practical Nurses.

Expanding and better supporting complete care networks, in order to address healthcare needs for the entirety of a patient's life. we need and must work on a faster process for doctors choosing Alberta as a new hope. Professional designations and licensing transfer must be happening faster.

3. Patients are experiencing extremely long wait times in emergency departments and hallways are lined with emergency responders who are unable to hand-off their patients. How will you address this crisis to reduce the waiting time for patients and improve the care they receive?

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Expanding and better supporting complete care networks, to address healthcare needs for the entirety of a patient's life. we need and must work on a faster process for doctors choosing Alberta as a new hope. Professional designations and licensing transfer must be happening faster. Expanding supports for primary care networks. Reviewing the overall composition and effectiveness of AHS as it comes up on 15 years since its founding, Cutting through nonsense restrictions like healthcare professionals being bound to one hospital when they could be practicing in multiple hospitals and responding in real time to surges in need.

4. Physicians support the medical home model, where many health professions work together (to their full scope of practice) to care for patients. How would you increase this team-based approach so that patients can avoid delays, avoid duplicate testing and receive the care they need, at the right time, from the right provider?

Expanding the adoption of Physician's Assistants and Practical Nurses in order to better support the implementation of the Medical Home Model, reviewing AHS in order to make sure it's working for patients, and aligns with the needs & expectations of healthcare professionals, and expanding the seats for healthcare professionals at our Universities in order to graduate the professionals that we need to provide complete care. We could work with AHS in order to facilitate some of the challenges those medicals teams are facing.

5. With respect to private contractors providing public health care services, how will you ensure all patients receive the same quality of care regardless of where they receive it or from whom? How will corporations like Telus or Shoppers Drug Mart fit into the delivery of health care for Albertans?

With AHS coming up on 15 years since its creation, it's critical to make sure that it's working for Albertans and meeting the needs and expectations of healthcare professionals. That means we need to do a check up and a check in on how we administer all of our healthcare services, particularly in regards to private contractors and how they handle patient information with integrity and sensitivity.

Working to insure that server warehousing is Alberta based first, and Canada second.

Making sure that Privacy standards are met and enforced.

And committing to privacy audits in order to meet the expectations of Albertans. Those tools can be useful, but tele-medicine

should not become the norm. We need a complete review and an understanding of what their share in treating patients is. Health care is personal, a iPhone is not always the best option to obtain adequate care

6. Academic medicine plays a unique role in delivering clinical care but also in research, teaching and leadership/administration. Academic doctors in Alberta want to know what you would do to sustain academic medicine and ensure that we attract the best and brightest to Alberta?

Make sure that funding is on par with enrollment. Research is an important anchor in our universities and hospitals and they should not be facing austerity. Our province has amazing universities, research centers and academics, and it is our duty to ensure that they are part of our critical human resources capital.

7. Albertans were having difficulties accessing mental health services before the pandemic and now it is much worse. What would you do to provide increased access for Albertans and particularly for children and youth?

Increase funding, beds and understand that mental healthcare is healthcare. There is no easy way around it. We also need to address the reasons why our psychiatrists are leaving the province.

8. The medical laboratory system in Alberta exists to help Albertans diagnose, treat and monitor disease. That system has been in constant flux over the past decade with changing directives of various governments. Significant infrastructure and equipment issues plague urban and rural communities alike. Given the history of conflicting directions with lab services in Alberta over the past decade, what is your plan to provide certainty and stability when it comes to this crucial medical service?

This will be a multi-disciplinary effort. We need to look at the past's problems, and ensure that we are putting processes in place that will not allow for sudden changes without any good reason. Our labs need to be appropriately funded. No one should wait 4 weeks for a routine blood test that could be life saving. We need to create a strong mandate for our laboratories that will be defining the expectations.

9. Patients expect government and system leaders to think about long-term quality, sustainability and better integration in health care. Sometimes the four-year election cycle of governments can complicate long-term decision making. How will you ensure that solutions and improvements in health care are truly in the best interest of patients over the long term?

By launching and supporting a robust review and consultation on the AHS and how it delivers and meets the needs for patients, and supports healthcare professionals. The government administers the funds being allocated to AHS. We need and must ensure that AHS has policies and systems that will be resilient from one government to another. Patients have been paying the high price of those changes and this needs and must stop. Continuity, quality, sustainability and better integration should not be directed solely from the government.

Only with trust and consultation of those who make up and administer the system can we maintain lasting and positive change that's insulated from short term thinking.

10. As many Albertans are aware, physicians have not had a contract with government for over two years. Do you see this as a problem and what is your plan to reach an agreement? If an agreement is reached, what priority would you place on building a solid working relationship with physicians?

We need to respect our medical professionals. I am extremely thankful for our doctors over the past two plus years, working through a pandemic and without a contract. We need to rebuild trust. And I will be there to support those efforts.