



United Nurses of Alberta

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Andrew Douglas
Director, Health Professional Regulation
Professional Regulation and Physician Workforce Branch
Alberta Health
10th Floor, ATB Place
10025 Jasper Avenue

Re: Proposals to Amend the Health Professions Act

I am writing you today on behalf of the more than 30,000 members of the United Nurses of Alberta (UNA), to provide feedback on the Alberta Health *Proposals to Amend the Health Professions Act to Improve Regulatory Effectiveness and Efficiency Discussion Paper*. In addition to representing Registered Nurses (RN) and Registered Psychiatric Nurses (RPN), UNA represents Health Care Aides and other regulated health professionals including Licensed Practical Nurses, Social Workers, and Occupational Therapists across Alberta.

First and foremost, we do not understand the basis for many of the sweeping changes that are being proposed in the discussion paper. There is little to no evidence provided as to why these changes are being recommended and what problem(s) they attempt to solve. Changes of this significance should be based on formal, broad, and transparent consultation with affected stakeholders, evidence and best practices in the field of health professions regulation, and detailed data and information regarding the challenges and problems that are encountered within the current model of health professions regulation in Alberta. Little of this was provided in the discussion paper that was shared with us for consideration.

Second, we question the timing of engaging Alberta's health professions on a subject of such critical importance in the midst of a global health pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic has placed considerable pressure on Alberta's health care system and the professionals working within it. This is a significant barrier to affected organizations (colleges, associations, and unions) being able to carefully consider and adequately engage their members on such far-reaching proposals. One of the proposals references the pandemic as a basis for the change, yet the pandemic is not over, nor is the problem it is supposedly addressing adequately described in the paper.

Overall, UNA is concerned that many of the proposals seem to be an attack on the self-regulation model of health professions in Alberta with no basis for proposing such extensive changes. This leaves us to conclude that this appears to be a huge government overreach. This will create significant costs and red tape at a time when this government is professing to want to avoid both.

In summary, UNA has significant concerns with both the process and timing of this consultation. We recommend pausing any further work on changes to the Health Professions Act and Regulations until the COVID-19 pandemic is over or in a prolonged period of stability. Further, we recommend:

1. Creating a steering committee with representation from Alberta Health, regulatory colleges, professional associations, unions, front line health care workers, and the public. The committee would oversee the consultation process and proposed changes to the *Health Professions Act*.
2. A consultation process that broadly and transparently engages affected stakeholders, allowing appropriate time for careful consideration, engagement, and response.
3. Revising the discussion paper/summary to consider and contain the following information:
 - a. Problem identification – issues/problems (with supporting information/data) and objective(s) and outcome(s) should be clearly described.
 - b. Option identification – all viable options (with supporting evidence/best practice information) to address problem and meet objectives/outcomes be clearly described including the risks, benefits, and costs of each option.
 - c. Decision making process –transparently describe criteria and an approach to deciding among options.
4. UNA strongly supports Proposal #6 from the discussion paper, i.e. to strengthen existing laws aimed at banning Female Genital Mutilation or cutting in Alberta, but we also recommend that “conversion therapy” also be banned.
5. All regulatory college investigators, council, tribunal, complaint review committee members should reflect the diverse population of Alberta and have formal training in just culture principles as well as root cause analysis.
6. Appointment of public members on regulatory College councils, tribunals, and complaint review committees should be transparent, non-political, and use a competency-based process. All members should reflect the diverse population of Alberta.
7. The recommendation to publish disciplinary decisions for a period of 10 years is unduly punitive. A summary criminal conviction can be expunged after only 5 years.
8. Recommendations regarding the formation of additional personal corporations are short sighted. This enables health professionals to become small businesses, lowering their tax obligation and fragmenting our healthcare system further, creating further obstacles to a cohesive, integrated public healthcare system.

UNA agrees that there are opportunities for improvement of both the Health Professions Act and the effectiveness of regulatory colleges in Alberta. However, this should only be done in a manner that involves careful examination of the current state, broad and meaningful consultation with affected stakeholders, and a review of

evidence and best practice to inform such changes.

Sincerely,



Danielle Larivee, First Vice-President
United Nurses of Alberta

c.c: Alberta College of Occupational Therapists
Alberta College of Social Workers
Alberta Medical Association
Alberta Union of Provincial Employees
College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta
College of Licensed Practical Nurses of Alberta
College of Registered Psychiatric Nurses of Alberta
Dona Carlson, Health Profession Regulation, Alberta Health
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