



**ALBERTA OMBUDSMAN**  
*Focused on Fairness*

May 26, 2009

**Ombudsman writes *Prescription for Fairness* for out-of-country health services**

***Recommends 53 actions to address administrative problems***

Edmonton . . . Alberta Ombudsman G.B. (Gord) Button today recommended changes to Alberta’s Out-of-Country Health Services Program. The recommendations aim to fix systemic problems and provide redress to applicants who have been treated unfairly in the past.

The Ombudsman has asked the Minister of Health and Wellness to respond within 45 days.

Late last year the Ombudsman launched an investigation into the fairness of the administrative processes used by the Out-of-Country Health Services Committee and Appeal Panel to review and assess applications for funding from Albertans.

A request for information from the public resulted in 59 telephone calls, 39 written complaints and 20 new individual investigations, in addition to the 10 in progress at the start of the investigation.

“A common concern was that complainants did not understand how the review bodies reached their decisions,” said Button. “They felt the Out-of-Country Health Services Committee and Appeal Panel failed to provide sufficient rationale to support their decisions.”

The 53 recommendations included in *Prescription for Fairness* aim to improve the quality and fairness of decisions by:

- improving communication with applicants and appellants—preceding, during, and following the decisions on their requests
- improving the accountability and transparency of the Committee, Appeal Panel and Department of Health and Wellness, and
- improving training for the review bodies

Significant recommendations include:

- after a hearing has taken place, applicants should receive complete disclosure of the decision—including the findings of fact and how the evidence was weighed in the hearing.
- physicians and dentists should complete and submit applications for funding on behalf of Albertans, with supporting documentation from specialists.
- the Appeal Panel should re-hear four cases because of issues of administrative unfairness identified during individual investigations. This recommendation is not new. The Ombudsman had previously asked the Appeal Panel to re-hear these cases. But those requests were denied.

“The Appeal Panel has maintained that the passage of time is an impediment to rehearing these cases,” said Button. “However, administrative errors were made by the Appeal Panel and Albertans should not be the ones to suffer as a result.”

In addition to recommending new hearings, the Ombudsman is asking the Appeal Panel to write its resulting decisions in a manner that complies with the administrative processes outlined in *Prescription for Fairness*.

The Appeal Panel has 45 days to respond.

The Ombudsman acknowledged the cooperation extended by the Minister and staff of Alberta Health and Wellness, and the chairs and members of the review bodies during the recent investigation. “I fully expect that spirit of cooperation and willingness will facilitate implementation of all of my recommendations,” said Button. “Albertans deserve no less.”

A full listing of the recommendations is included in the Ombudsman’s report *Prescription for Fairness*, Visit [www.ombudsman.ab.ca](http://www.ombudsman.ab.ca) and click on “what’s new.”

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To contact Trevor Clark, representing a former applicant for out-of-country health services funding, please speak with Glen Resler after the news conference.