

BULLETIN

## A conversation worth having

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**his month** the Conversation on Health gets going in earnest, with the first two public forums set for Kamloops and Surrey.

In addition to the public forums, "health professional" forums are scheduled, as well as smaller focus groups of health professionals. HSA members will be participating in the latter two forums, but health care providers are barred from the public forums.

While all signs point to the Liberal government having already made up its mind on options for the future of health care, that is, an expansion of private delivery, HSA members are taking the Conversation at face value and actively participating where they can to ensure the government hears their perspectives about our health care system.

Premier Gordon Campbell launched the Conversation on Health Care by announcing that health care costs in BC are out of control, unsustainable, and could overwhelm BC's provincial budget in the next decade.

When he announced the Conversation process, he also said he wants to add a sixth principle for medicare: sustainability.

In Gordon Campbell's medicare, the principles of universality, accessibility, comprehensiveness, portability and nonprofit administration would all be trumped by "sustainability," or ... in plain language ... affordability.

If a case can be made that we can't afford medicare, then the principles that have guided universal health care in Canada would become secondary.

Since the Conversation process was announced, the government has continued to relentlessly attempt to make the case that we can't afford medicare, apparently working to steer British Columbians into believing that universal health care isn't an option, and that we have to make way for health care options that would allow those who can afford it to pay for access.

But the arguments don't hold up to scrutiny.

As summarized by political columnist Paul Willcocks in the Vancouver Sun last fall, "In 1985, health spending was about five per cent of GDP. By 1995, it was 6.6 per cent. This year it will be about 7.3 per cent. The increase is an issue, but the notion that we can't afford health care ... that it's not sustainable ... is simply not supported by the facts."


That's why your participation in the Conversation on Health is important ... so that the public record continues to show ... as it has for decades ... that Canadians support a health care system that is equal and accessible to all.

There are a number of ways to make your voice heard. For those who do not work in health care, registration is open to participate in the 16 public forums being held from January through to the summer in 16 communities across the province. There are, however, registration deadlines far in advance of the forums, so you are encouraged to register as soon as possible, even if the forum in your community is not for a few months. To register for the public Conversation on Health forum, visit [www.bcconversationonhealth.ca](http://www.bcconversationonhealth.ca).

Health care professionals are eligible to participate in health professional forums the evening preceding the public forum. Registration for those forums is also at [www.bcconversationonhealth.ca](http://www.bcconversationonhealth.ca). In addition, HSA has been invited to appoint representatives to smaller groups for focused discussion on issues concerning those who work in the system.

The government's process includes opportunities for you to have your say online, by e-mail, fax and by phone. Visit the Conversation on Health website for details.

Finally, the BC Health Coalition and community groups around the province are also organizing alternative discussions about the future of health care. For information on the BCHC campaign, "Neighbours Talking Health Care," visit [www.bchealthcoalition.ca](http://www.bchealthcoalition.ca).

There *are* opportunities for health professionals to express their point of view about health care and HSA members have a lot to say and contribute. While we may be skeptical about the sincerity of these processes, the stakes are too high to ignore the invitation. 

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