

# TELE-FACTS

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## *New Alberta Health Plan*

AN ADDRESS BY

**Hon. Dr. J. D. Ross**

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**Hon. E. C. Manning:**

Good Evening, Ladies and Gentlemen:

We have some interesting and important matters to discuss with you tonight, so I hope you are all set to enjoy a profitable quarter of an hour. I have with me, the Hon. Dr. Ross, your Minister of Public Health, to give you some factual information on Public Health matters, in which you are all rightly interested. Next to Education, Public Health services require the largest sum of public expenditures of any Department of government. This year, your representatives in the Legislature have approved spending nearly \$169 million for Hospital, Medical, and other Health services. This is an increase of nearly \$16 million over last year. We are trying to provide the very best possible services for the money spent. Let's get right down to cases. Dr. Ross, it is good to have you with us tonight. One of the fields of Public Health, in which there is a great deal of interest today is the matter of Mental Health. Perhaps you would like to start out this evening with a few comments on that topic.

**Hon. Dr. Ross:**

Thank you, Mr. Manning. Recently, there has been a fair amount of controversy regarding Mental Health services in Alberta, and the voluntary organizations that are set up to consider Health problems naturally look at the negative aspects of present programs. The Government that is elected by the public does have the responsibility, however, to develop programs to meet the needs that are not able to be met, or are not being met, by private services that are available from the Psychiatric wards and the doctors in general hospitals. Presently, there are some 200

beds available to the people in Lethbridge, Calgary and Edmonton in our general hospitals for Psychiatric short-term care. Many of these are psycho-neurotic or anxiety-state types of patients, and do not require the long-term care that is provided in our Mental Hospitals. At present, there are some 2500 beds in our hospitals at Oliver and Ponoka to care for those types of mentally-ill patients who have a more severe type of psychosis. During the past number of years that we have been renovating and replacing some of the older buildings, we have been able to reduce the crowding that has occurred and that is common to many hospitals of this type across the country.

This past twenty years has seen the Province of Alberta, through your Social Credit Government, spend over \$30 million to improve the facilities in our Mental Health care system. The ability to segregate many of the patients into the various types of illnesses has been made possible through the development of the facilities at Red Deer for the mentally-defective patients, and in Rosehaven and at Claresholm for the senile and chronic psychotic patients, where over 1,000 beds are available to care for this type of patient.

Beds alone are really not enough, and I am happy to have you know, as the Premier has just mentioned, that there have been very substantial sums of money provided in this year's estimates for an improvement of the Mental Health services in our Province. The very large numbers of skilled professional people that are required to make up a team — the psychiatrists, psychologists, psychiatric social workers, nurses, and other types of occupational and recreational therapists — and who work together to help the people with mental illnesses, are not easy to come by. It has been necessary to substantially increase the pay rates

for these people, and I can say that our pay rates are now equivalent and compare favourably with other places across Canada. It is my hope that, with the new positions made available, and the funds available, we will be able to secure the types of personnel that are needed to bring to Alberta an improvement in the Mental Health services.

The question of research is one that is often raised, and we are actively concerned with this, and have spent a substantial amount of money on it. As was mentioned in the White Paper recently, it is the intention of the Government to make a very comprehensive survey of the Mental Health services in Alberta, so that, in the years ahead, we will have the opportunity of making sure that your Mental Health services will be among the top in this country.

**Hon. E. C. Manning:**

Thank you, Dr. Ross. I am sure our people realize that they can look forward to this important field of Mental Health getting top priority. We will never be satisfied, of course, until we have in this Province the very finest and best facilities and treatment services.

Another area in which there is a great deal of growing interest today is this matter of alcoholism. Your Department has some new programs in that field. Would you like to say a word on that?

**Hon. Dr. Ross:**

Thank you, Mr. Manning. The Division of Alcoholism, which formerly was the Alcoholism Foundation of Alberta, is carrying on an extensive program of education and treatment and practical research, to try and make advances in dealing with this very substantial Public Health problem

in our Province. Some 15,000 to 20,000 people suffer from the disease of alcoholism and it is a very destructive illness. We have out-patient treatment centres, in Edmonton, Calgary and Red Deer. There are visiting teams going out to rural areas. I am very happy to be able to announce that we have a new in-patient treatment centre that will be available early this summer in Edmonton, which will enable the substantial care, which requires longer periods of time, to be conducted within our own Province.

**Hon. E. C. Manning:**

Perhaps the biggest single area of Public Health in which the great interest is today is the matter of prepaid Medical Services. This, of course, takes in the facilities of our entire Alberta Health Plan. Suppose we conclude the meeting with our friends tonight by having you give a little outline of what is going on in that field, Dr. Ross.

**Hon. Dr. Ross:**

The Alberta Health Plan started back in 1963 with the Alberta Medical Plan — a voluntary, insurance-type of program that was worked out by the Government, the medical profession, and the carriers. It has been a successful type of program. We have recognized though, during this past year or more, that there is need for simplification and for making greater benefits available to the public of this Province. Because of this, we are presently bringing an Act into the House which will establish a more comprehensive type of Health Plan, operated by a Government agency in the Department of Health, and which will provide for a standard type of contract that will be made available through the Government.

This standard contract will have two definite areas to it. The basic Health Services will now be expanded beyond that of merely the doctor services, to include the services of the optometrist for refraction of eyes, the podiatrist and the osteopath for the treatment of the feet and the back, and also certain dental procedures that are related to injuries and diseases of the jaw. I feel that having these basic Health Services under one policy is a definite advance, and is certainly the type of coverage that you people have indicated to us you wish to have. There will also be optional Health Services available; and of importance to those in the older age group, are the Hospitalization benefits which will be available to people, regardless of age, or state of health. Other benefits here will be drugs, ambulance services, and prosthetic appliances. A third group will be chiropractic and naturopathic services.

The first of July will see the start of a new year for the Alberta Health Plan. It is my firm opinion, that with the new Act which we will be bringing in, and with the Health Services that will be available, we will be able to achieve the percentage of population required under this voluntary type program. By utilizing the Government agency, as well as the non-profit corporations such as M.S.I. and Blue Cross, and the insurance companies, we will be able to make available to the public of this Province, Health Insurance coverage for groups, individuals, and for those people who are entitled to subsidy, a type of program that will be ranked with the best in our nation. It is my sincere hope that all of you who are interested in this will pay attention to the advertising we will be doing shortly to make the public aware of this new program, utilizing both the Government and the other car-

riers, to bring to the people a comprehensive, broad type of Health Services. I trust that in the months ahead, and in the years ahead, you will feel that your Government has done the proper thing, by making available to you under a voluntary program, this ability to protect yourselves against the exigencies of the high cost of Health services, and by providing for those people in low income groups substantial subsidies to assist them to secure this type of program. I feel that it is important that we do accept our responsibility in these matters.

### **Hon. E. C. Manning:**

Ladies and Gentlemen; as Dr. Ross has outlined to you tonight, our objective in this matter, as far as Alberta is concerned, is to see that the very best and comprehensive types of prepaid Medical Services are available to all of our people within their ability to pay, without being subjected to unfair and severe financial stresses. We are confident that this program can be made operative this way, without compelling people to participate if they do not wish to participate; and as Dr. Ross has said, without taking away from the individual the proper degree of personal responsibility, which, as citizens, we all realize the importance of retaining.