

Public health vital to keeping Albertans safe

Recent news articles — “Rural health regions ailing: Audit finds patient safety risks, rogue community hospitals” (*The Journal*, June 6); “Health inspector shortage puts Peace region at potential risk” (*The Journal*, Jan. 26), and “Audit spotlights floundering system” (*Calgary Herald*, June 6) — have echoed the conclusion of an audit completed by Deloitte in 2006 and 2007.

These articles point to real and identifiable issues observed by the auditor that create potential health risks to Albertans. Specifically, the audits found that in the Northern Lights, East Central, Peace Country and Palliser regions, shortages of health inspectors, increasing public health workloads and a lack of adherence to food safety standards pose “significant potential risks” to Albertans.

The Alberta Branch of the Canadian Institute of Public Health Inspectors (CI-

PHI Alberta) believes that health protection is one of the cornerstones of public health. Public health inspectors and environmental health officers are the professionals appointed to protect the health of the public in Alberta. They are trusted to consistently ensure safe environments, safe air, safe water, and safe food through assessments, inspections and investigations. These professionals undertake advanced educational training and are nationally certified to ensure the highest level of service and competence possible.

With the continuing population growth in Alberta, it is imperative to ensure that the public facilities Albertans use and the environments in which they live in receive the expected amount of attention.

As such, CIPHI Alberta believes that Albertans should not have to compromise their expected standards of public health

because of economically prosperous times.

Furthermore, to rationalize these identified potential risks to the public by waiting for the system to “catch up” is a dangerous precedent.

As the government of Alberta embarks on the restructuring of the health-care system under the newly formed Alberta Health Services Board, we would urge that support be given to rural and urban areas to recruit and retain public health inspectors and environmental health officers.

It is our opinion that these environmental public health professionals can play an important role in ensuring the long-term sustainability of Alberta’s health-care system.

*Phi Phan, president,
Canadian Institute of Public Health
Inspectors, Alberta,
Drumheller*

EDMONTON JOURNAL

Publisher
JOHN J. McDONALD III

Editor-in-Chief
ALLAN MAYER

Deputy Editor
BARB WILKINSON

Vice-President Finance
DAVID BECKER

Vice-President Production
JOE CELINO

Vice-President Advertising
JOHN CONNOLLY

Vice-President Marketing
PAT HUTCHISON

Vice-President Reader Services
DOUG WASS

PUBLISHED DAILY BY THE PROPRIETOR,
EDMONTON JOURNAL,
A DIVISION OF CANWEST PUBLISHING INC.
AT THE JOURNAL BUILDING, PO BOX 2421, EDMONTON,
ALTA., T5J 2S6

The Edmonton Journal publishes a variety of opinions as a contribution to debate on matters of public concern. Unsigned editorials express a consensus view of the editorial board, which includes Opinion page editor David Evans, and editorial writers Sheila Pratt and Alan Kellogg. Signed pieces and cartoons express the view of the writers and cartoonists only.

Edmonton Journal, Sunday June 15, 2008