



Fast

# FACTS

CANADIAN CENTRE FOR POLICY ALTERNATIVES – MANITOBA

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## Paging Dr. Peachey: Health care reform off the rails

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**H**ealthcare watchdogs are talking about the return Dr. David Peachey to Manitoba. The re-emergence of the architect of Manitoba's health reforms needs to be critically examined. Should the person who developed a plan be the same person evaluating its success or failure? Health Minister Friesen has asked Dr. Peachey to review and offer recommendations on the second phase of the health care overhaul, with consideration of the closure of the Concordia Emergency Room. As Minister Friesen puts it Dr. Peachey is doing 'a quality assurance exercise' with the expectation that the review will be complete within two weeks.

The Peachey report was commissioned by the previous NDP government and taken up by the now Progressive Conservative government. There were a number of recommendations and suggestions presented in the report, which included, closures of emergency departments, consolidation of health services, changes to mental health and addictions approaches and calls for dedicated funding to address inequities in the system, among many others. The government took parts of the report for their health care overhaul, but by no means are the recommendations being implemented in as a whole. While most Manitobans will not wade through the

240-page report, they undoubtedly have experienced or heard about the results of its partial implementation.

We are currently in Phase II of the 'healing our system' overhaul, it is no secret that both Phase I and Phase II have been marked with massive disruptions and issues. From chronic understaffing, to deletion notices of staff positions and reductions in services for Manitobans, the health care overhaul has not been smooth sailing, most notably our health care workers and quality of care. There is much debate regarding the effectiveness of the health care changes, in fact, figuring it out can be likened to an episode of 'To Tell the Truth'. Transparency and accountability is lacking as citizen's groups are forced to rely on of Freedom of Information Requests to extrapolate information from government regarding items such as, spending levels on personal care homes (only \$39,200 spent since 2016 in new capital expenditure), cancelled cardiac surgeries (which increased to 27%), the use of private nurses to fill staffing gaps

Even what is actually being spent on health care is marred in political pivoting and misinformation. For example, the budgeting amounts dedicated to health care remain underspent and in fact, in the previous fiscal year to the tune of \$241 million dollars. The underspending of health services is in large

there is an alternative.

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part due to regional health authorities following directives from our government to find 'efficiencies' commonly known as cost cutting which comes at the expense of a quality, safe and accessible public health care system. These are being felt in the regions, from the elimination of maternity care in Flin Flon to the closure of the Family Medical Centre at the St. Boniface hospital.

The re-emergence of Dr. Peachey for a snap two week review is falling along two dominant political narratives. On the one hand, the government assuring folks that Dr. Peachey is here to do the responsible thing, to ensure the plan is going well and that Manitoba is proceeding as it should. On the other, the opposition parties are saying the pop-by from Dr. Peachey is an indication the government does not actually have a plan and things are going off the rails.

The fact is Dr. Peachey is being paid by approximately \$100,000 by the government to deliver an assessment on his own recommendations in two weeks. Minister Friesen expects Manitobans to accept this timeline and his methods of inquiry on face value. What about the objectivity of his assessment? While we can respect Dr. Peachey and his commitment to academic integrity, it does not preclude him from the human condition and attempts to save face if his recommendations are not delivering the results as promised.

Due to all the concerns with the health care overhaul, the Manitoba government would be wise to pause the second phase of the overhaul and instead of installing Dr. Peachey to do the review, seek a neutral third party.

Finally, Dr. Peachey's arrival and soon to be released assessment appears to coincide with the Premier's indications of an early provincial election. It is disconcerting that this government continues to place political points ahead of what is best for Manitobans and

what is best for our health care system. Playing politics with people's health is irresponsible and reckless.

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References available upon request.