

# Who Is My Neighbour...

...when it comes to public healthcare?

Albertans are ready to lend a helping hand to a neighbour whose cattle are sick, or whose tractor breaks down, or whose child gets injured. They generously hold fundraisers for Stars Air Ambulance, or any cause they find worthy. They'll even give a few bucks to a homeless person begging outside their local Starbucks, if they believe he's a deserving guy down on his luck.

We see a more callous attitude reflected in the recent actions of the new health "superboard." They've cut long-term hospital beds, leaving the mentally ill, the sick elderly and their families to fend for themselves. (See "Supersized," p. 32.) These elderly are the very people who built this province; who worked hard as labourers, tradesmen, teachers and nurses, often taking care of others rather than storing up wealth for themselves. Now the message from our government is: "Take care of yourself."

This attitude is generally reflected in provincial government policy. Take coverage for diabetics, for example. Those with juvenile diabetes, which can't be prevented, have their insulin pumps paid for. Those with type 2 diabetes, related to diet and fitness, don't. (See "Universal Care [Some Exceptions Apply]," p. 39.) Diabetes is not merely a matter of bad personal choices. Changing social conditions are creating a diabetes epidemic. This is a social problem. What's more, the complications that result from untreated diabetes will be costlier for the system.

Health is a public concern, not just a private matter. If an untreatable plague sweeps in, we'll all be affected. The overuse of antibiotics in our society has resulted in the mutation of bacteria so that they no longer respond to drugs. (See "The Bugs Stop Here," p. 26.) We need good public policy to safeguard our health.

Delisting healthcare services and cutting hospital beds

creates business opportunities for private entrepreneurs to profit in providing necessary services and facilities for those who can afford to pay. Those who can't afford to pay must then fall on the mercy of charity or do without. If sick people are left to care for themselves when they can't afford to get the help they need, the health of the whole community is jeopardized.

Why aren't more Albertans outraged at our government's blatant violations of the principle of universal access to healthcare? I think we're confused about personal and public responsibility. Government "free enterprise" ideology plays right into Albertans' pride in their independence and self-reliance, their hatred of government "interference," and their belief that everyone should provide for themselves. Inability to discern the difference between individual and government responsibility leaves us vulnerable to manipulation by those promoting narrow self-interest rather than what's in the best interest of all Albertans.



Who is my neighbour? The point was made in a parable 2000 years ago: Even the stranger, even my so-called enemy, is my neighbour. So what is the most effective way to help our neighbours when it comes to health? We pay taxes to the government to provide infrastructure and services for the common good. We should expect government to act in our collective best interest. But our current government operates more in the interests of business than in the interests of citizens.

Let's reaffirm our commitment to the principle of universal access to quality healthcare regardless of a person's ability to pay. Let's not have our nursing homes and our ambulances depend on charity fundraisers.

*Jackie Flanagan*

## ALBERTA VIEWS STAFF

**Founding Editor**  
JACKIE FLANAGAN

**Associate Editor**  
EVAN OSENTON

**Art Director**  
STEVE ARTHUR

**Departments Editor**  
JOE WILDERSON

**Intern**  
PETER WORDEN

**Circulation/Advertising**  
BETH ED  
403 243 5334 (ex. 1)

**Controller**  
KELIE JENSEN

**Administrator**  
NICOLE KAJANDER

**Calgary**  
403 243 5334

**Toll Free**  
1 877 212 5334



SUBSCRIPTIONS In Canada: \$29.99 per year [includes GST]. In US: \$60.00 CDN. Mail cheque or money order, subscribe by phone or visit [www.albertaviews.ab.ca](http://www.albertaviews.ab.ca).

ALBERTA VIEWS is published by Alberta Views Limited Partnership  
208-320 23 Avenue SW, Calgary, Alberta T2S 0J2 Telephone: 403 243 5334  
Toll-free (in Alberta only): 1 877 212 5334 Fax: 403 243 8599

CONTENTS COPYRIGHT 2009 Written queries with article proposals should include the author's résumé, tear sheets and a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

All requests for permission to reprint should be made in writing to the editors.  
Printed in Canada. GST Registration No. 89455 6307. ISSN No. 1480-3151.  
PUBLICATIONS MAIL AGREEMENT NO. 40024877.

RETURN UNDELIVERABLE CANADIAN ADDRESSES TO: CIRCULATION DEPARTMENT, 208-320 23 AVENUE SW, CALGARY, ALBERTA T2S 0J2