

**Blue Cross Dinner Meeting  
October 1, 2012 – Edmonton  
Hon Dave Hancock, Minister, Human Services**

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak with you this evening.

For almost 25 years, Alberta Blue Cross has played an important role in supporting the Government of Alberta in developing and implementing health benefit programs.

You are a valued partner in enabling us to meet the needs of thousands of Albertans.

That is particularly true for the work you did during the design and implementation of the Alberta Child Health Benefit Program in 1998.

And for the support and expertise you provided in 1999 related to the development and launch of the Alberta Adult Health Benefit program, and again in 2004 for the Learners.

One of the things I also want to acknowledge is the way you do what you do.

You have consistently acted in keeping with our Alberta Public Services values of respect, accountability, integrity, and excellence.

For that, I thank you on behalf of the Albertans we both serve.

Government is in a period of transition as we reconfigure departments to best meet the needs of Albertans now and in the future.

The creation of a Ministry of Human Services is part of that transition.

However, regardless of government organization, the partnership we have developed continues.  
(Pause)

One of the reasons I was eager to speak with you tonight is because you are quite a special group of business people.

It is sometimes difficult for business people to easily understand how social policy affects their bottom line.

You know that providing supports for those in need makes a real difference to the quality of life in our communities.

My current task is to help the entire business community come to the same conclusion.

If I were to ask any group of business people what their most important asset is, I think most of them would say their employees are.

That is why they provide their employees with benefit plans and why many of them focus on encouraging and enabling their employees to find the right work/life balance.

Benefits play an important role in worker attraction and retention.

But so too does the quality of life in the communities in which they are located.

Several years ago, I was talking with some business people about the challenges they faced in attracting the best talent to their city and what made the difference as to whether the people they attracted stayed there.

They told me that their success in recruiting had little to do with low taxes or even salary levels.

What really worked was when potential employees actually wanted to live in a community.

It was far easier to attract people when people perceived a community as being safe, having a good education system, a healthy environment and a great quality of life.

As one of them said to me, “We need to be a place where the CEO’s spouse wants to live.”

So what makes a community the kind of place in which we want to live?

I think it is safe to say that all of us want to live in a community that is safe, with a good education system, a place with clean air and water.

But in an increasingly complex and challenging world, quality of life goes beyond those things.

For example, many parents find themselves facing challenges in raising their children that their parents either did not face or were not aware of – autism – dyslexia – developmental delays are just a few of them.

Imagine that you have just moved and are settling into your new job.

An examination by your one-year-old’s doctor appears to indicate that your little one may be developmentally delayed and could be autistic.

What will you do if you find out that the services your child is likely to need to even have a chance at success in life aren’t available in your new location.

Will you stay here and hope everything works out for the best?

Or will you start looking for a job in a place where you can access the services your child needs?

Imagine now that you have just received a call from your mother and she tells you that your father - who is in the early stages of dementia - has wandered off?

How focused will you be on your job that day?

What will that mean if the job you do can be a danger to yourself or others if you are not completely focused on it? (Pause)

Employee engagement and productivity are key to Alberta’s future.

However, many of the social challenges we currently face militate against productivity, focus and success. (Pause)

Growing up in a small community taught me that if there is something the community needs, its citizens have an obligation to help meet that need.

Communities are safe when engaged citizens work together to make it safe.

Government can be a partner in that process.

It cannot and should not be the driver.

So if we all want safe healthy communities, what are the barriers to achieving that goal?

Homelessness is one major barrier.

When you do not have a home, you do not feel a part of the community, you do not have a stake in its future.

This helps create an environment which fosters bad behaviour and creates a draw on the economy.

It costs about \$100,000 per homeless person to provide emergency, medical and other supports.

With housing and wraparound supports, that cost drops to about \$30,000 per year.

Alberta Human Services is responsible for enabling communities to provide a wide range of supports and services.

These include everything from worker safety and employment standards - support and services for children – supports and services for those facing physical and intellectual challenges - and help for those who are trying to escape domestic violence. (Pause)

Right now, many Albertans are involved in creating a new Social Policy Framework for Alberta.

This framework is meant to be owned by Alberta's communities.

It will enable them to see the services that are available and where they fit into meeting the needs of community members.

The end result of this exercise will be to enable communities to determine if they are providing the right services at the right time and in the right place.

It will also enable communities to determine if the supports and services they provide are producing the outcomes they need and want.

For example, do job training services actually result in more people being able to find jobs?

The Social Policy Framework initiative also aligns with Premier Redford's commitment to results-based budgeting.

It signals a change from a focus on inputs to a focus on outcomes. (Pause)

It has been 30 years since we as a province asked ourselves what our responsibilities to each other are.

Alberta has changed a great deal during those three decades and it is important that what we do today in the area of social services accurately reflects today's realities.

We need to get beyond the way we have done things in the past and determine who is best able to do what.

And we need to be able to demonstrate to Albertans that social services are not a cost, but an investment in Albertans that pays real and measurable dividends.

Fifteen years ago, I entered public life with the belief that I could make a real difference to the quality of life for all Albertans.

I now find myself in a ministry which through collaboration with communities has the ability to do just that.

But to achieve that goal, we need you as business people and community leaders to be on board.

We need you to be engaged in the process.

We need your expertise and experience.

This is especially true in the areas of job training, work readiness, and the employment of individuals who are all too often excluded from the workforce.

We need you to help us ensure all Albertans have the opportunity to become productive and engaged citizens to the best of their abilities.

For the past few months we have been consulting with Albertans about the future of social services in the province.

Unfortunately, business has not been as engaged in the process as it could and must be if we are to succeed in providing the services needed in the most cost effective manner.

We are soon going to begin Phase II of the development of a Social Policy Framework and I want you at the table. Your input is vital to the success of this process.

I am asking you to share your business contacts with me and to encourage your colleagues, friends and neighbours to take part in shaping the social future of this province.

Let's work together on it.

It will be good for business.

Thank you.

