

Romanow and Beyond: A Primer on Health Reform Issues in Canada

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Introduction

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Introduction

Canadians are currently awaiting the release of the final report from the Commission on the Future of Health Care in Canada (the Romanow Commission) expected at the end of November 2002. Along with the already-released final report from the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology and a series of provincial reports released over the last five years, there is a remarkable body of work available to decision makers as they contemplate changes to Canada's health care system. A First Ministers' meeting is expected early in 2003 to review recommendations and to decide on an implementation approach. What are the likely areas of agreement and disagreement?

This paper has two objectives:

- To summarize emerging themes in key Canadian health reform reports over the last 5 years at the provincial and national levels; and,
- To identify areas of agreement and disagreement within the key themes.

The paper is neither an extensive literature review nor a comprehensive summary of all the recommendations presented to the public. It is meant to be a primer for those interested in the future of the Canadian health care system but unfamiliar with the existing rules, arrangements and proposals for reform.

Reports Reviewed

We reviewed five provincial reports (Alberta, New Brunswick, Ontario, Quebec and Saskatchewan) and three national reports (National Forum, The Senate Committee and the Interim Report from the Romanow Commission). The mandates of each varied from general investigative and consultative processes to analysis of specific reforms such as the implementation of regional health authorities. Appendix A provides brief details about each review process.

Health Reform Themes

Nine themes are identified as priorities for health care reform. While the reform documents highlighted many other issues, these nine themes appeared consistently at the provincial level, the national level or across both jurisdictions. The nine major themes are:

- A focus on population health;
- Financing the health care system;
- Primary care reform;
- Regionalization of service delivery;
- Pharmaceutical policy;
- Health human resource planning;
- Quality improvements and infrastructure supports;
- Governance and accountability mechanisms;
- Home care services.

Table One provides a quick summary of the themes in each report. The X indicates the theme appeared specifically in the report as a section or recommendation. As the interim report of the Romanow Commission did not contain specific recommendations, we classified the themes on the basis of the areas the Commissioner identified for further discussion.

**Table One
Themes for Health Reform in Canada**

	Population Health	Finance	Primary Care	Regionalization	Drugs	Health Human Resource	Quality	Governance	Home Care
Alberta	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	
New Brunswick	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	
Ontario			X	X		X	X	X	
Quebec	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	
Saskatchewan	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
National Forum	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Kirby	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Romanow	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X