



ASSOCIATION OF MANITOBA MUNICIPALITIES

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Dr. Jerry Gray, Chair
RHA Review Committee
PO BOX 48065 RPO Lakewood
Winnipeg, MB R2J 4A3

Dear Dr. Gray,

The Association of Manitoba Municipalities (AMM) is writing to submit concerns regarding the current Regional Health Authority (RHA) system for consideration throughout the RHA Review.

Municipalities are concerned about the delivery of health services and a review of the RHAs is due as the system moves into its tenth year of operation. The AMM is therefore pleased to submit concerns that are raised annually at the AMM Convention and impact all 198 municipalities in Manitoba. These include the need for better communication between RHAs and municipalities, RHA Board accountability, and the role of RHAs in the recruitment of medical professionals.

Communication

Enhanced communication is a vital component of a sustainable health delivery system. The initial creation of RHAs dramatically altered the delivery of health care services in Manitoba, and the amalgamation of certain RHAs has created some difficulties. Municipalities are publicly driven by their communities to ensure that effective health care services are available, but RHAs are not very responsive to local community needs. The lack of effective mechanisms for meaningful feedback from municipalities and their residents needs to be addressed in this review. The decision-making that is undertaken by RHA Boards has a significant impact on local residents, therefore the public should have opportunities to provide input into local health service delivery.

In addition, municipalities are increasingly expected to contribute to the cost of health care services and therefore should have greater input regarding the issues that affect their residents. For instance, the Assinboine RHA recently required municipalities to cover the cost of ambulances that attend fire scenes. This is clearly a downloading of Provincial services to the municipal level and municipalities have no authority to negotiate or provide meaningful feedback on such changes. A further example is the practice of requiring local communities to contribute to the costs of health capital projects including the requirement to fund 100 per cent of any change order. Municipalities are becoming more and more involved in health care, yet this is being done with little to no discussion with municipalities. Municipalities are always willing to work with the Province and RHAs to find the best way to provide needed services, but they need to be part of the decision-making process. This can only happen with an improvement in communication.

*Representing
Manitoba's
Municipalities*

Accountability

Municipalities and the public are also concerned with the lack of public accountability of RHA Boards under the current system. Municipal officials are far more accessible to residents than RHA Boards and consequently become the recipient of complaints regarding local health care services. RHA Boards should be accountable for their decisions and be available to address concerns. Instead municipalities are in the position of being held accountable by the public. Municipal councils are willing to defend the decisions they make, but it is unfair to expect them to defend the decisions of RHAs, especially when they have no role to play in the decision-making process.

A key improvement to the accountability of RHA Boards would be to alter the process of board member selection. Currently, RHA Boards are appointed by the Minister of Health leaving local communities without a voice to address their key issues. Municipalities have been encouraged to make nominations for appointments, however a wide range of individuals interested in and involved with health services make nominations each year. Therefore, this process does not guarantee that local interests will be successfully represented. There are also concerns with public accountability of provincial appointments as often RHA Board members are seen to be working for the government that appointed them, and not the local area.

There is currently sufficient flexibility in the legislation since Section 14(1) of *The Regional Health Authorities Act* indicates that the prescribed number of directors will be “appointed or elected in accordance with this Act and the regulations.” Therefore, the Minister of Health is authorized to determine the process for selecting the RHA Board. Since the supportive legislation is in place, increasing accountability by creating locally elected RHA Boards is a policy decision of the Provincial Government. The demonstrated need for increased responsiveness to local communities and enhanced accountability necessitates a review of the current procedure and a thorough examination of electing RHA Boards.

Recruitment of Medical Professionals

Recruitment of medical professionals, in particular physician recruitment, is an ongoing concern for municipalities. Without sufficient access to physicians and other medical professionals, residents are required to travel to get medical attention or forgo medical care. This situation is not ideal and needs to be rectified.

Currently some municipalities are effectively bidding for physicians to work in their community, which can include providing financial incentives. This is not possible for all municipalities, nor should it be necessary for any municipality. Municipalities recognize that they have a role in the recruitment and retention of medical professionals. This includes enhancing communities in order to attract medical professionals and educating residents on types of appropriate interactions with medical professionals in order to ensure that they feel comfortable in the community.

For several consecutive years, the AMM membership has passed resolutions regarding the need to improve health services by training, attracting and retaining medical professionals for all Manitoba communities. There is a critical shortage of medical

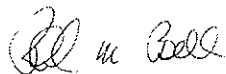
professionals throughout this province, and a coordinated effort must be undertaken in order to counteract this trend.

The Office of Rural and Northern Health (ORNH) is working with communities to assist in attracting medical professionals. The ORNH is also working to encourage rural youth to enter health care fields and return to their communities in order to increase the number of medical professionals in rural settings. Other positive aspects of health care professional recruitment include the work being done by Manitoba Health in coordination with the University of Manitoba – Faculty of Medicine, and the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Manitoba. These organizations have developed a new process for licencing international medical graduates (IMGs) that was implemented in the Fall of 2006. The process should increase IMG success in practical settings and should increase physician placement in rural communities as there are approximately forty candidates finishing the program annually.

These initiatives should continue to be completed at the Provincial level, as they are issues that impact all communities province-wide. However, innovative practices should be devised on an ongoing basis in order to effectively attract and retain medical professionals throughout Manitoba. The Provincial Government, as the order of government that is responsible for health care, should allocate additional funding to these important measures. The health of Manitoba communities has wide-ranging effects on the competitiveness and sustainability of Manitoba, and providing local access to high quality health care services province-wide is a vital part of this process.

The AMM is interested in the review of the RHA system and therefore requests that the RHA Review Committee continue to consult with the AMM and municipal/community groups in all RHA regions to ensure that all municipal concerns are addressed. We encourage your committee to travel to various communities throughout Manitoba and hear firsthand the municipal concerns regarding RHAs. We would like an opportunity to meet with the committee directly to discuss these issues in greater detail. As well, the AMM would request that the progress of the RHA Review Committee be conveyed throughout the review so that all municipalities are kept informed. If you have any additional questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact our office, and we look forward to meeting in the near future to discuss this issue in greater detail.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ron Bell". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "R".

Ron Bell
President