

As a consequence of ongoing cuts and closures, Manitoba's health care system is being stretched much too thin.

There is only a 0.5% increase to health care spending, which is below inflation and another de-facto cut. Moreover, the Pallister government has made a habit of underspending its budget. In 2017-18 they underspent by \$200 million, and this year they are forecasting \$240 million. In effect, this has wiped out any budgeted increases to health care.

Meanwhile, the federal government continues to provide Manitoba with annual 3% increases to health care, and is offering \$400 million for mental health initiatives. Manitobans need to ask: what is the provincial government doing with this funding? It appears that it's being used to balance the budget on the backs of nurses and patients.

Nurses are working flat out just to hold the system together, and this is resulting in increasing nursing vacancies, overtime, and workload. These issues undermine quality patient care, forcing patients to wait longer in emergency rooms and for important procedures like cardiac surgery.

Moreover, we have not seen a real commitment to improving care for long-term care residents. Last year, MNU released a landmark report on this issue, which recommended increasing direct care hours per resident per day from 3.6 to 4.1.

The Official Opposition has put forward legislation (Bill 201) which would legislate this target and require annual reporting by the Health Minister. However, the budget does not substantively increase funding for long-term care, and such a target is unlikely to be achieved within such austere budgetary conditions.

The fact that this government is celebrating underspending in a time of serious need shows just how out of touch they are with what's happening on the front lines of health care.

We encourage nurses and all Manitobans to join us in speaking out, and advocate for safe patient care. Sign our petition to end health care cuts and send a letter to your elected officials in support of Bill 201 at www.putpatientsfirst.ca.