

Health reforms will allow paid upgrades of some services

Last updated Jul 13 2005 10:31 AM MDT

[CBC News](#)

A better hospital room or hip replacement is yours for a price, under health-care reforms announced by Premier Ralph Klein Tuesday.

Klein's plans to improve the province's health-care system include allowing people to buy secondary insurance that will pay for treatments from podiatrists and chiropractors.



Premier Ralph Klein

- [GOVERNMENT OF ALBERTA: Getting on with better health care](#) 

The proposals have drawn praise and criticism, as Albertans try to determine what the government's plans mean.

Klein and Health Minister Iris Evans were quick to say that their plans don't create a two-tier system, and that the province will continue to pay for basic medical care for all Albertans. But the opposition parties disagree.

"What we're going to see out of this is one level of health care for ordinary Albertans and another level of health care for those who can afford it," Liberal Leader Kevin Taft said.

"Next year we can offer you, through private insurance, a tip-top hip, as opposed to the basic hip. Two years later, we'll be able to offer you a different kind of heart procedure or a different kind of hospital or clinic.

"Instead of strengthening and binding and improving the system through these actions, the Tories are dismantling it, or working towards dismantling it."

NDP Leader Brian Mason says the government's plans are the definition of a two-tier system.

"The poor, then, are entitled under this program to wait long and suffer more during recovery than the rich," he said.

But John Carpay, with the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, said the reforms are long overdue.

"If you can pay more money to get a better quality or faster hip replacement, you should be entitled to do that," Carpay said. "And if that's what they're moving ahead with, then that's a good step in the right direction."

Evans and Klein said providing choice to patients doesn't necessarily create better or faster access to necessary procedures. They said they are working on that aspect of the system, including improving efficiencies and allowing patients to see wait times and get details on their surgeon.

"It's not intended to fast-track the system," Evans said of allowing people to pay for access to procedures such as hip replacements. "It's intended to provide people the choice."

But she did say the upgraded services, which patients pay for, won't have to be done in a hospital and are more likely to be performed at private clinics.

Federal Health Minister Ujjal Dosanjh says he has to look at Alberta's proposals more closely, but at first glance he didn't have a problem with the reform package.