

Provincial Health Tour | Fall 2022

Stettler – September 20, 2022

What We Heard Summary

The Government of Alberta and Alberta Health Services are jointly hosting a series of engagement conversations across Alberta over the Summer and Fall of 2022. The Provincial Health Tour has been designed to allow for Alberta Health and Alberta Health Services to engage with our healthcare staff, partners and stakeholders in communities across the province. The conversations are designed to share current approaches and priorities, discuss the current state of healthcare delivery and future opportunities, celebrate our successes and work together to identify strategies to address challenges within the healthcare system.

Stettler

30 Stakeholders participated representing municipal and community leaders



MLA Garth Rowswell (Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright) welcomed stakeholders.

Minister of Health Jason Copping provided an update on healthcare including sharing successes and an update on Government investment and areas of focus.

AHS Board Chair, Gregory Turnbull and Acting VP, Cancer Care Alberta and Clinical Support Services, Karen Horon shared the AHS Health Plan and priority areas, as well as the challenges and opportunities for our future vision.

The power of partnerships

AHS Board Chair, Gregory Turnbull shared a number of partnerships unique to Stettler including:

- The Stettler Health Foundation raised more than \$8,000 toward the atrium refresh project for Stettler Hospital at a recent golf tournament.
- The Festival of Lights – starting Nov. 29 – will mark its 25th anniversary this year. Last year, the event raised \$90,000 for the local hospital.

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Alberta Health Highlights

Budget

Alberta Health’s budget is \$22B, and anticipated to increase by \$600M a year over the next three years including key investments as follows:

- \$64M increase to EMS budget
- \$60M in new funding over three years to expand recovery-oriented support for people experiencing addiction and mental health issues
- \$3.7B for continuing care, community care and home care programs
- \$3.5B over three years in capital funding for health facilities, equipment and IT systems across the province.
 - The Health Capital plan also includes \$45M over three years for the Rural Health Facilities Revitalization Program.

Physician Recruitment

Approximately \$90M is being spent in 2022 including:

Rural Remote Northern Program:	~\$57M	Rural Medical Education:	~\$6M
Rural Integrated Community Clerkship Program:	~\$4M	Rural Health Professions Action Plan (RhPAP):	~\$9M
Locum Program:	~\$3M	Rural Physician On-Call program:	~\$12M

Alberta Health is working with RhPAP on its Rural Education Supplement and Integrated Doctor Experience (RESIDE) program to help address challenges in rural and remote areas.

System Recovery

Over the next three years, AHS will perform between 20 and 23 per cent more surgeries compared to 2018-19 to reduce surgical wait lists.

AHS will return to pre-pandemic surgery wait list status by the end of 2022-23.

AHS is resuming many regular public health activities in 2022-23.

AHS will add 50 permanent, fully staffed ICU spaces by the second quarter of 2022-23.

Government is providing funding for more ground ambulances and additional EMS staff.

In each of the next three years, AHS will add about 1,000 new continuing care spaces and increase the number of unique home care clients by four per cent.

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AHS Health Plan 2022-25

AHS is entering a new era of transformation and innovation. The Health Plan 2022-25 is the roadmap for this exciting journey. At the heart of this plan are the 10 priorities that align with direction from the Minister of Health and reflect feedback from patients, clients and families who have received care from AHS.

The 10 priorities are:



1. Alberta Surgical Initiative

Implementation of the Alberta Surgical Initiative, ensuring that, by 2025, all Albertans receive their scheduled surgeries within clinically approved wait times.



6. Rural Initiatives and Engagement

Rural engagement and rural initiatives, to strengthen partnerships with rural communities, to better support the rural healthcare workforce and to better meet the unique needs of Albertans living in non-urban communities.



2. EMS 10-Point Plan

Implementation of the EMS 10-Point Plan, designed to improve EMS services and availability, especially in rural and remote communities.



7. Continuing Care

Continuing care, increasing the numbers of continuing care spaces and living options, expanding home care hours, and shifting reliance from facility – to home-based care when appropriate.



3. Mental Health and Substance Use Recovery

Mental health and opioid recovery, which includes adding AHS-managed treatment spaces, and expanding in-person and virtual recovery-oriented programs and services.



8. Workforce Recruitment and Retention

Workforce recruitment and retention, which involved supporting our current workforce following more than two years of pandemic response, as well as recruiting and retaining needed healthcare workers.



4. Pandemic Response and Recovery

Pandemic recovery, which involves adding acute care spaces (ICE beds), supporting continued access to vaccines and treatments to COVID-19, and establishing specialty clinics to support Albertans with ongoing COVID-19 symptoms.



9. Quality of Patient Outcomes

Quality of Patient Outcomes, ensuring patient safety and high-quality care are maintained and enhanced during a period of transformative change in the organization.



5. Digital Health Evolution and Innovation

Digital health evolution and innovation, including the ongoing rollout of Connect Care and continued expansion of virtual health to support more community – and home-based care, programs and services.



10. Sustainability

Financial sustainability, ensuring that AHS is run efficiently, with Albertans getting full value for every health dollar.

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At the event, we held a working session where participants reflected on the following questions:

- *What is our healthcare system doing well?*
- *What challenges currently exist within the system?*
- *In addition to what is currently being done, how can we better address challenges?*

Here's a sampling of what we heard in Stettler.

What we are doing well

Partnerships and fundraising by **the Stettler Health Foundation** were highlighted by community as things that are working well in Stettler. The generosity of the community has been extraordinary.

The quality, dedication and caring of local **healthcare workers** were identified by many participants as a success and something that is working well. *“We have great physician and nursing care – very passionate care,”* said one participant. Another said *“staff are great and doing a great job under the circumstances”*.

Community members also highlighted the well-executed **COVID immunization campaign** implemented during the pandemic.

Top healthcare challenges and opportunities

“There are challenges to negotiate the contract with health services with municipal partners (i.e., County of Stettler Ambulance, MD Bonnyville, Ponoka County).”

Access, workforce, wait times, and EMS were all raised throughout the afternoon as both challenges and opportunities.

The primary concern with respect to **EMS** related to negotiations for a contract with the municipality. Many also identified EMS wait times are getting longer and that core-flex shifts are no longer a benefit in rural EMS.

One participant commented that **access** for an MRI through AHS is eight months but you can get same day service if you pay privately. Besides access to diagnostics, participants talked about mental health, emergency department closures, and a lack of equitable services in rural areas compared with urban centres. Several suggested process improvements to maximize capacity for diagnostics like CT and MRI.



“The local support of municipalities and residents is extraordinary.”

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Wait times were definitely a pain point for community members who participated in the Stettler event. Some identified a seven to eight-hour wait at the emergency department and also identified the long waits for those who are in hospital and require a continuing care space.

Finally, there were multiple discussions about the **workforce**. While many commented on the high quality of care and the excellent staff, they also said more has to be done to address burnout and to find ways to improve work-life balance. Recruitment and retention was on the minds of many contributors to the conversations including for physicians and nursing in both acute and continuing care. Suggestions for improvement included *“eliminating all the red tape for healthcare workers to come to Alberta to work – there are too many restrictions and roadblocks”*, and the addition of financial incentives to bring healthcare workers to rural communities to work.

Other challenges identified included: **transportation, infrastructure**, the **org structure** of AHS where some said there are too many managers, and **continuity of care**.

Evaluation of event

Of the 27 individuals who completed a survey (both internal and external events in Stettler):

- 26 (96%) responded that the topic was highly relevant, and something they wanted to know more about (18 ranked as 5 out of 5; 8 as 4)
- 25 (93%) felt strongly that the session was a good use of their time (15 ranked as 5 out of 5; 10 as 4)

Respondents appreciated the opportunity to meet with the minister and AHS leaders, including the Board Chair. They were pleased decision-makers are listening and were interested to learn they are not alone in their concerns and that efforts are underway to address the challenges.

Several participants said they would have liked more time for discussions and less time for presentations.

Next steps

- All notes and partnership ideas generated from the Provincial Health tour will be shared with Alberta Health and Alberta Health Services leadership.
- A regular newsletter is being distributed to event registrants and participants.
- A report and recommendations will be produced by Alberta Health.

Thank you

We are grateful to all who took the time to meet with Alberta Health and Alberta Health Services leadership to discuss the future of healthcare in Alberta. Your experience and personal insights will inform future planning and changes that will improve healthcare for all Albertans.

Contact us: community.engagement@ahs.ca