

Wood Buffalo

2017/18 Annual Report



Wood Buffalo
Health Advisory Council

Healthy Albertans.
Healthy Communities
Together.

Message from Alberta Health Services Board of Directors



Dr. Brenda Hemmelgarn

Healthcare is a people business and Alberta Health Services (AHS) alone cannot build a healthier province. Through the work of our Advisory Councils, all Albertans have an opportunity to have a say in what we do at AHS; and that's vitally important to our organization.

Council members bring the voices of Albertans to AHS whether through the geographically located Health Advisory Councils or the program-focused Provincial Advisory Councils and Wisdom Council. They build relationships with Albertans and keep the lines of communication open. They are our partners, and their feedback has helped us make the right decisions on how we care for Albertans and how we deliver health services. Their efforts continue to make a positive difference in people's lives every day.

As Chair of the Community Engagement Committee of the Board, I've had the pleasure to connect with many Council members and see their work evolve and expand over the past year. There are direct links between their efforts and the advancements we've made as a health system overall, and in communities across the province. Here are just a few examples:

- **Connect Care** - members offered insights about the system, and had opportunities to join three different committees to help shape what the system would look like.
- **Zone healthcare planning** - members participated in building Calgary and Central Zone healthcare plans, and sharing specific needs for the communities they represent.
- **PCN governance committees** - members have been invited to join zone committees.
- **Continuing care** - through interviews, council chairs provided comments and suggestions to help build continuing care plans and solutions in the zones.
- **AHS Health Plan and Business Plan** – members offered perspectives and suggestions into the plan; their input shaped the goals, objectives and performance measures, particularly in the areas of long term care and mental health. They also actively shared the plan with communities across Alberta.
- **Special engagement meetings for Albertans** - many of the Councils had the opportunity to host engagement activities from Open Houses to forums to information sessions, both in person or by video conference.

Other milestones include adopting a new look and brand, carefully developed work plans, and attending the Annual Advisory Council Fall Forum to engage about healthcare issues and connect with each other.

On behalf of the AHS Board of Directors, our leadership team, and our workforce, thank you for all you do. We look forward to continuing to work with you on improving healthcare for Albertans.

Sincerely,

Dr. Brenda Hemmelgarn,
Vice Chair, Board of Directors
Chair, Community Engagement Committee of the Board
AHS

Message from the Chair, Wood Buffalo Health Advisory Council



Jon Willcott

As a young and new member to the Council, I was elected to the position of Vice Chair in April of 2017 and assumed the Chair role until elections in November of 2017. The Chair, Paul McWilliams was transferred in June of 2017. Jim Moore was elected to Vice Chair in November and to Chair in March.

I enjoyed the experience leading the Council in learning more about programs and services in AHS. We also asked questions and provided feedback to AHS about what we were hearing in the community.

Recovery from the fire in 2016 is ongoing and it is difficult for families who suffered losses. This has been complicated with companies downsizing due to the downturn in the economy. This has resulted in numerous job losses. There is and will be an increased need for mental health support for some time in our Council area.

Another ongoing challenge that plagues our area is the recruitment and retention of health professionals, physicians and specialists. We have a great community with lots to offer yet many still consider the Wood Buffalo area to be remote.

We are pleased that construction has begun on the long term care centre in Fort McMurray. Not only do we need a long term care facility, but the acute facility can definitely use the space on the fourth floor to expand much needed acute services such as obstetrics. Currently, long term care residents reside on the fourth floor of the acute hospital, the Northern Lights Regional Health Centre.

And finally to answer this question we saw on social media: “Why did they change the name from a hospital to a healthcare centre?” A Health Centre is a facility that offers more than just acute services. Our Northern Lights Regional Health Centre is proud to offer acute, ambulatory, allied health, specialty, long term care and so much more. A Health Centre is so much more than a hospital. It is a one stop shop!

Sincerely,

Jon Willcott, Interim Chair
Wood Buffalo Health Advisory Council

About Our Council

2017/ 2018 Council Members

Current Members

Jim	Moore (Chair)	Fort McMurray
Tinna	Ezekiel (Vice Chair)	Fort McMurray
Jonathan	Willcott	Fort McMurray
Cathryn	Beck	Fort McMurray
Bonnah	Carey	Fort McMurray
Mary	Gerosa	Fort McMurray
Sandra	Grandison	Fort McMurray
Valerie	O'Leary	Fort McMurray
Carol	Theberge	Fort McMurray
Ifeoma (Rita)	Uzorchukwuamaka	Fort McMurray

Past Members

Cathy	Underhill	Fort McMurray
Todd	Hillier	Fort McMurray
Valerie	Hill	Fort McMurray
Heather	MacKay	Fort McMurray



Back row left to right: Jon Willcott, Murray Crawford, North Zone Senior Operating Officer

Front row left to right: Ifeoma (Rita) Uzorchukwuamaka, Carol Theberge, Bonnah Carey, Mary Gerosa, Sandra Grandison

Missing: Jim Moore, Cathryn Beck, Tinna Ezekiel, Valerie O'Leary

Priorities for our Council

Wood Buffalo HAC focused on the following priorities during 2017/2018:

Recruitment and retention of health professionals

- Council heard from a Nurse Practitioner student about their education, their advanced scope of skills, licensing and competency. They learned that a barrier to recruitment is the lack of a proper funding structure or implementation plan to effectively use Nurse Practitioners to their full potential.
- Council received a report at each meeting about recruitment of physicians and specialists to Fort McMurray. They were also kept informed of vacancies.
- Council welcomed the new mandate of the Rural Health Professions Action Plan (RhPAP), formerly the Rural Physicians Action Plan. The new mandate supports the attraction and retention of a number of health professionals in addition to physicians in rural Alberta. Their goal is to promote rural Alberta communities and support the retention of staff.

Community engagement and promotion of Council

- The members of the Council are connected to many networks. At each public Council meeting, the voices from the networks were brought forward by Council members. Engaging conversations were held with AHS leadership at meetings.
- Council partnered with AHS to begin planning an Open House for April of 2018 to share information about various health portfolios.

5

Public meetings were held in Fort McMurray.

20

Public members attended council meetings in 2017/2018.

6

Presentations were given on a variety of health topics and from different groups such as Addictions and Mental Health, Capital Planning, RhPAP, Nurse Practitioners, Health Quality Council of Alberta and the Advisory Committee on Aging.



Engaging the public

There was interest shown in the Council over this past year with 20 members of the public in total attending the five HAC meetings. The members of the public learned about the role of the Council. They also received information from AHS about local services and infrastructure improvements, and were able to ask questions during the meetings. Some of the questions related to:

- The new heliport at the Northern Lights Regional Health Centre.
- The recruitment of a psychiatrist to the community.
- The status of respiratory illnesses post fire.
- Wait times for mental health services via video conference, also known as tele-mental health.
- The use of more video conference for access to specialists.

Providing feedback and advice to AHS

Council advised North Zone that the recruitment of physicians and specialists to the community is very important, and there is a specific need for female physicians. Council suggested the addition of other specialists to reduce the amount of time citizens in the community must travel to Edmonton. Suggestions included obstetricians, gynecologists, pediatricians, a neurologist and a gerontologist.

Construction started on an upgrade to the building envelope of the Northern Lights Regional Health Centre. Parts of the exterior of the building were covered to support the replacement of windows, stucco, insulation, soffits, and fascia during winter. Council advised AHS North Zone capital management that the public thought the facility was damaged from the 2016 fire. They asked for information about the project to share with the public.

For more information about Health Advisory Councils, visit [ahs.ca](https://www.ahs.ca)

Topics on the minds of our Council and community members

Access to addiction and mental health services and continuing care facilities

- An Addiction and Mental Health (A&MH) Services manager attended a meeting with Council and outlined the programs available for early intervention, prevention and treatment. The goal of A&MH is to create a healthy society that is free from the harmful effects of alcohol, drugs, tobacco and gambling through promotion, prevention, early intervention, assessment and treatment.
- Ground work began on a site across from the Northern Lights Regional Health Centre for the new continuing care facility in Fort McMurray. The site, referred to in the community as Willow Square, is expected to open in 2019 with 144 long term care beds.

Access to specialists

- The recruitment and retention of specialists to the community continued to be top of mind for Council as well as community members. In particular, obstetricians, pediatricians, female physicians, and midwives are needed in the area.

Services to help residents recover from the fire

- Recovery will become tougher in the next few years, with possible increases in domestic violence, sexual assault, and suicides.
- Council members highlighted the need for ongoing attention to the community due to the fire. They met with the AHS addiction and mental health leadership and shared this feedback.



A look ahead

The effects of the fires of 2016 were still felt throughout the community. In year two, more family violence, divorces and suicides occurred in the community.

The demand for addiction and mental health services continued. Many of the Council members work in areas which provide services for the vulnerable populations and these populations continued to be in need of services including addiction and mental health as well as specialty services.

We were pleased to be invited to an engagement session on Enhancing Care in the Community and we look forward to ongoing work with this. There are many groups engaged in this work and we are providing input into ways to enhance home services for those in need of home care.

We were pleased to receive a regular AHS report at each meeting about workforce, capital projects and major news and initiatives. We look forward to learning more about the services available in the Council area.

We will continue to provide feedback and possible solutions to the recruitment and retention of medical professionals including physicians and specialists. We will help and support AHS and the RhPAP where we can.

We want to increase the awareness of our Council within the Wood Buffalo HAC area. We will try to make connections and build relationships with the communities outside of Fort McMurray so we can gather feedback from those living in rural and remote areas.

We would like to attend at least one health fair and hold one open house in the coming year. We will also continue to assess other methods to connect with the communities and gather feedback.

Learn more

- Visit ahs.ca and search Advisory Councils
- Email woodbuffalo@ahs.ca
- Check out our Twitter and Facebook accounts, by searching AHS Advisory Councils

Get involved

You can make a difference to the health and well-being of your family, friends, neighbours and community by sharing your thoughts and ideas with AHS. You can get involved by:

- Attending an upcoming meeting. Agendas and notices are posted on the Advisory Council webpage: ahs.ca.
- Delivering a presentation at a Council meeting on a health area of interest or concern.
- Volunteering your time as a Council member. Recruitment drives happen annually. Members are appointed for three-year terms.



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