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Surgeries Increased, Wait Times Reduced

EDMONTON – Alberta Health Services (AHS) and Alberta Health and Wellness today announced a six-week plan through March 31 to immediately increase the number of surgeries in high-priority areas.

Surgeries will be further increased during April, May and June as more surgical capacity becomes available, including more operating-room time and increased availability of surgeons and surgical teams.

At least 2,230 more surgeries and non-surgical procedures with long wait lists have been approved for the initial surge through March 31, including urgent cancer surgery, orthopedic surgery (including hip and knee replacements), gynecology, neurosurgery, heart surgery and cataract surgery. As well, 3,500 more MRI and CT scans will be added immediately.

"In response to what Albertans have told us, we are working quickly and strategically to provide faster access to priority health services," said Minister of Health and Wellness Gene Zwozdesky. "Today's announcement demonstrates direct action toward improving performance and reducing wait times, driven by the 5-Year Funding Plan announced last week."

Increases in non-surgical services (such as endoscopies) are also now underway. More surgeries and non-surgical services will be performed at several hospitals throughout Alberta, including: Foothills Medical Centre, University of Alberta Hospital, Mazankowski Alberta Heart Institute, Peter Lougheed Centre, Rockyview General Hospital, Royal Alexandra Hospital, Northern Lights Health Centre, Medicine Hat Regional Hospital, and the Queen Elizabeth II Hospital in Grande Prairie. (See Backgrounder for the list of procedures and locations.)

"We recognize that wait times and wait lists are too long. Now, with Government's recent commitment to funding certainty and greater stability, we are able to use more of our resources for priority areas identified in our strategic plan," said AHS President and Chief Executive Officer Dr. Stephen Duckett.

"Increasing surgeries immediately and continuing to increase them over the next several months, marks the beginning of our longer-term plan to increase access and quality of care. We'll move as quickly as safe practise and the availability of surgical teams permit," Dr. Duckett said.

"Having additional surgical capacity is great news for our patients," said Dr. Chris Eagle, Executive Vice-President, Quality and Service Improvement. "We will immediately address wait times for cancer surgery and other priority procedures. We will also measure the impact on wait times and wait lists in order to better guide surgical capacity growth and improve access overall."

Costs for the 2,230 additional surgeries will be about \$8 million. The number of surgeries performed will continue to increase steadily. AHS is compiling wait time and wait list information that will be publicly reported annually. The impact on wait times and wait lists will be evaluated as part of the longer-term plan. AHS will also provide the year-over-year increase in total surgeries at that time.

Alberta Health Services is the provincial health authority responsible for planning and delivering health supports and services for more than 3.5 million adults and children living in Alberta. Its mission is to provide a patient-focused, quality health system that is accessible and sustainable for all Albertans.

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