



## Message from Dr. Verna Yiu & Dr. Laura McDougall

### *AHS Update: First member of the public receives vaccine; gratitude for 2020*

*Please print and share with your teams as needed*

Dear staff, physicians and volunteers,

#### **Today's Update**

- **COVID-19 Cases in Alberta**
- **COVID-19 Testing for Healthcare Workers, Influenza Updates Paused**
- **First Member of the Public Receives Vaccine with Updated Vaccine Rollout**
- **Online COVID-19 Immunization Appointment Booking Tool and Recruiting Immunizers**
- **Special Year-end Video Message with Verna, Premier Kenney and Minister Shandro**
- **Verna's Weekly Video Message — Role of Advisory Councils**
- **Straight Talk from You — 'I Got Scared ... We Are Trained to Not Be Scared'**
- **Photos of the Year**
- **Sharing the Love**
- **Gratitude from Albertans**
- **Wrapping Up — Thanks for 2020; Hope for 2021**

## COVID-19 Status

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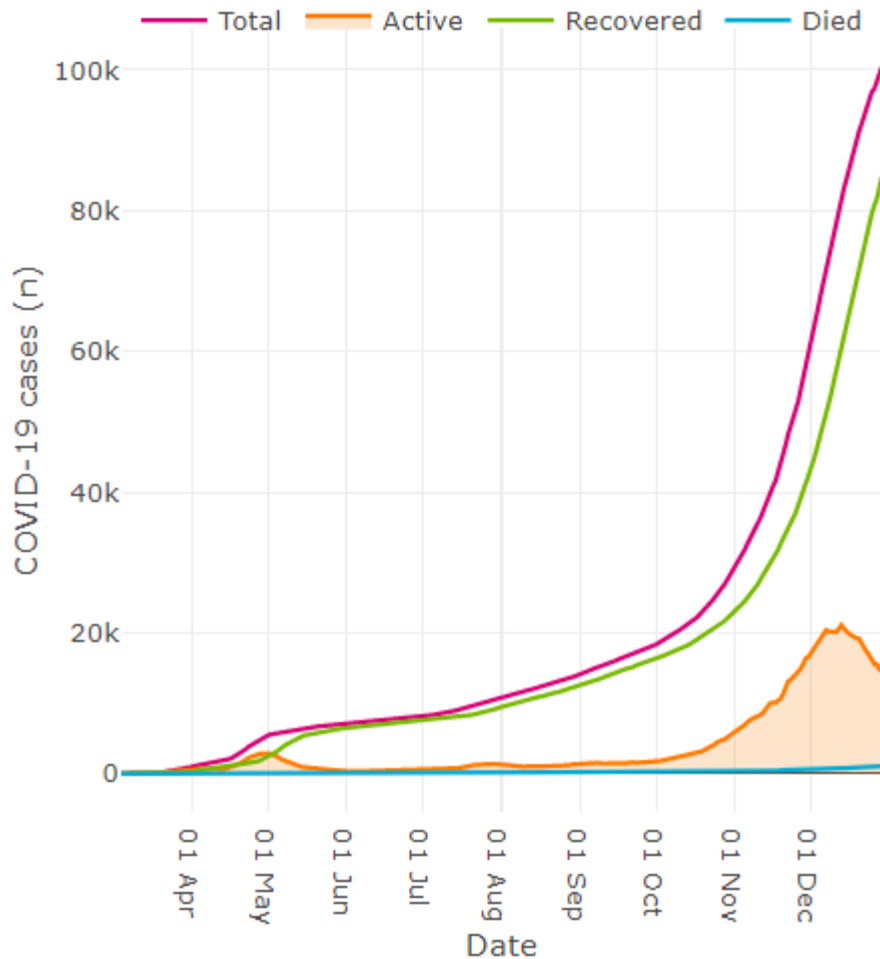
For the third consecutive week, the average number of daily new cases of COVID-19 in Alberta has decreased. There was an average of 969 daily new cases for the seven-day period ending on Dec. 29\*, compared to 1,318 cases the previous week (Dec. 16 to 22), a 26 per cent decrease. Although this decrease in the average number of daily new cases is positive, it is in-part a reflection of the reduced amount of testing taking place over the holidays. The Edmonton Zone had the largest number of new cases this week at 3,008 (44 per cent of all new cases in the province), followed by the Calgary Zone with 2,190 new cases this week (32 per cent of all new cases in the province).

*[\*Note: Usually, the numbers provided in this weekly update capture a seven-day period from Thursday of the previous week to Wednesday of the present week. However, due to the winter holidays, the numbers in the current update represent the seven-day period from Wednesday, Dec. 23 to Tuesday, Dec. 29.]*

From Dec. 23 to Dec. 29, there were 3,412 cases among individuals aged 20 to 49 years, which is 50 per cent of all new cases during that time period. However, cases continue to occur in every age group; this week, 928 new cases were reported among school aged children (5 to 19 years) and 1,292 new cases were reported among older adults (aged 60 years and older).

As of Dec. 29, there are 14,555 active cases in the province, whereas one week earlier on Dec. 22 there were 17,821 active cases in the province; this is a decrease of 3,266 active cases. While the Edmonton Zone continues to have the most active cases with 6,624 this week, overall the number of active cases decreased from the previous week by over 20 per cent for Edmonton, Calgary and South zones. The North Zone had a smaller decrease in the number of active cases (-5.6 per cent) and Central Zone had a small increase in the number of active cases (2.8 per cent). A full breakdown of the number of active cases on Dec. 29 compared to Dec. 22 for each zone is presented below:

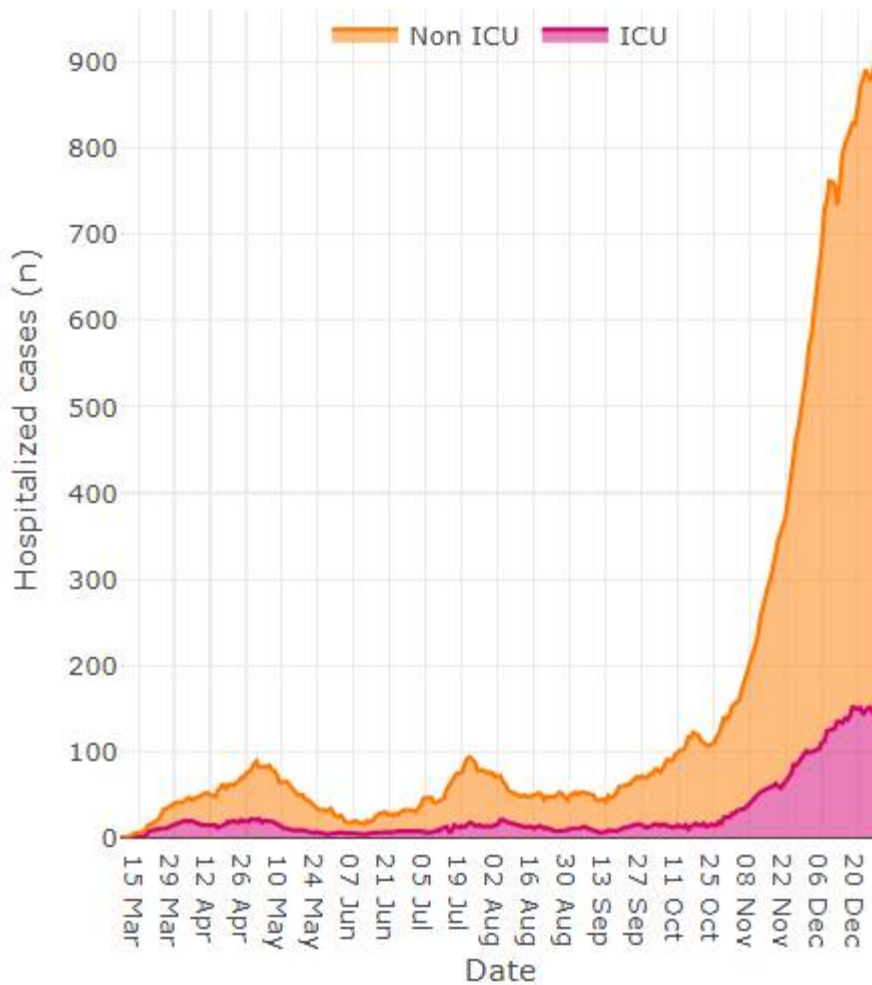
	Active Cases (week ending Dec. 29)*	Active Cases (week ending Dec. 22)	Per Cent Change
<b>Edmonton</b>	6,624	8,427	-21.4%
<b>Calgary</b>	5,129	6,470	-20.7%
<b>Central</b>	1,430	1,391	2.8%
<b>North</b>	1,031	1,092	-5.6%
<b>South</b>	296	390	-24.1%
<b>Unknown</b>	45	51	-11.8%



**Hospitalizations and ICU admissions**

Although new and active case numbers have been decreasing, the number of individuals being treated for COVID-19 in Alberta hospitals continues to trend upward. On Dec. 29, there was a record of 921 individuals being treated for COVID-19 in Alberta hospitals, with 152 of those in intensive care units (ICUs) and 769 in non-ICUs. One week earlier on Dec. 22, there were 821 total hospitalizations, which is a 12 per cent increase in total hospitalizations this week. The breakdown of hospitalizations by zone as of Dec. 29 is as follows:

	Hospitalizations	Patients in ICU
Edmonton	515	83
Calgary	242	50
Central	94	12
North	57	4
South	13	3



#### Other notable COVID-19-related information:

- On Dec. 29, Alberta surpassed 100,000 cases of COVID-19 confirmed in the province, with a total of 100,428 cases and a total of 3,687 individuals having been hospitalized, which amounts to 3.7 individuals for every 100 cases. In all, 84,827 Albertans have recovered from COVID-19.
- Alberta reached a grim milestone this week, reaching 1,000 deaths since the start of the pandemic. As of Dec. 29, 1,046 individuals have passed away from COVID-19 including 156 in the previous week (since Dec. 22). We extend our condolences to the families of these individuals, and to all who have lost loved ones from any cause during this time.
- From Dec. 23 to Dec. 29, 89,884 COVID-19 tests were completed, an average of 12,840 per day. During this period, the daily positivity ranged from 6.41 per cent to 9.55 per cent. As of Dec. 29, a total of 2,780,732 tests have been conducted and 1,650,655 individuals have been tested.

## Things You Need to Know

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### **COVID-19 Testing for Healthcare Workers, Influenza Updates Paused**

Due to the holidays, our COVID-19 healthcare worker testing [dashboard](#) and influenza updates have been paused until the new year. Our annual influenza immunization campaign continues.

For staff, check [Insite](#) for options to get the flu shot, [resources](#) to support this year's campaign and guidance on what to do if you experience [influenza-like symptoms after immunization](#). More on clinics for the public, including your families, is available on the [Alberta Health Services \(AHS\) website](#).

If you got your flu shot at [a public health clinic](#), pharmacy or doctor's office, please remember to complete the [Got My Flu Shot Form](#). This online form can be submitted with just the click of a button.

### **First Member of the Public Receives Vaccine in Alberta as Rollout Plan is Updated**

On December 30, Sheila Veeder, a resident at Riverview Long Term Care Centre in Medicine Hat, was the first member of the public to receive the COVID-19 vaccine in Alberta.



Veeder is one of thousands of Albertans living at a long-term care (LTC) or designated supportive living (DSL) site, identified to receive COVID-19 immunization during Phase 1A of the vaccine rollout. Residents in all LTC and DSL sites are included in this initial rollout and AHS will work with sites over the coming weeks to support on-site vaccine delivery.

The arrival of 16,900 doses of Moderna vaccine in Alberta yesterday is making it easier for AHS to start to bring the vaccine to the bedsides of thousands, immunizing long-term care and designated supportive living residents where they live.

In an effort to immunize as many Albertans against COVID-19 as quickly as possible, effective December 30, under the direction of Alberta Health, AHS will no longer

hold second doses of existing Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine stock on reserve from the shipments we have received to date, but will provide at least one of the two required doses to as many Albertans as possible.

The first 3,900 doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine that arrived in Alberta earlier this month were cleared for immediate single dose use, but some of the 25,350 additional Pfizer-BioNTech doses were held back to ensure second doses would be available because future shipments were unknown.

As of 11:00 a.m. December 31, more than 11,000 healthcare workers have received their first dose of COVID-19 vaccine, as well more than 500 long term care/supportive living residents. With these changes in effect, we expect this number to rapidly increase.

AHS has now moved from Early Phase 1 of COVID-19 vaccine delivery to Phase 1A, which was originally scheduled to begin January 2021, meaning we are going to provide more vaccine to more Albertans, faster.

As of December 30, the following groups in Alberta are eligible for COVID-19 vaccine:

#### Phase 1A Groups

- Respiratory therapists\*
- Healthcare workers in intensive care units\*
- Staff in long term care and designated supportive living facilities\*
- Home care workers
- Healthcare workers in emergency departments
- All residents of long term care (LTC) and designated supportive living (DSL), regardless of age

\* Designates groups included in Early Phase 1 as well as Phase 1A.

This change was also supported by the decision by Pfizer on December 22 to allow its product to be moved from designated freezer sites so it can be delivered in LTC/DSL facilities, which increased the feasibility of vaccinating LTC and DSL residents where they live.

Assuming vaccine delivery remains as scheduled, everyone in the six groups listed above will have an opportunity to receive at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccine before the end of January 2021.

To effectively allocate the vaccine in our province right now, Alberta continues to take a phased approach to offer immunization to specific populations who are being impacted the hardest by COVID-19, including residents of long term care and designated supportive living sites, and the care teams who could transmit COVID-19 to them, as well as the healthcare workers most needed to ensure workforce capacity.

We know that many of you have questions about when you will be considered eligible to receive immunization. We recognize that many staff and healthcare partners work with COVID-19-positive and higher-risk patients who are vulnerable to COVID-19 and we greatly appreciate the vital work you do.

We continue to carefully consider all groups and criteria to ensure COVID-19 vaccine is appropriately distributed the moment it arrives and are committed to transparently communicating all decisions about the immunization rollout as soon as they are known. All AHS staff and partners will have an opportunity to be vaccinated in the weeks and months to come as more vaccine supply becomes available.

AHS will continue to directly contact all Phase 1A staff and physicians who are eligible to receive the vaccine to set up appointment bookings. We ask that you answer any phone calls you receive from AHS, so you do not delay booking your immunization appointment.

### **Online COVID-19 Immunization Appointment Booking Tool and Recruiting Immunizers**

Starting January 4, AHS will launch a new online booking tool that will allow eligible healthcare workers to book their COVID-19 immunization appointments online from their phones or computers.

AHS staff deemed eligible to receive the COVID-19 immunization during this phase of the rollout will begin to receive an email with a unique link to go online and book their appointment to get immunized.

Emails will go out in stages, based on vaccine availability across the immunization locations. If you do not receive an email right away, please be patient and do not call Health Link. We anticipate immunization booking emails to go out to eligible staff over a number of days based on vaccine availability.

The link provided to each eligible healthcare worker is a one-time link that will no longer be valid after an appointment is booked. This is put in place to help ensure people are being booked in for their immunizations at the right time, based on the criteria outlined by Alberta Health.

The online booking tool provides identified healthcare workers with options to choose a preferred time, date and location to receive their immunization. The tool also ensures the healthcare worker books a second dose within the allowable date range. Please note that although the online booking tool facilitates the second dose booking, it is possible your second dose appointment may have to be rescheduled based on vaccine availability. If that is the case, you will be contacted by AHS and given instructions about how to rebook for a later date.

The booking tool will help speed up our immunization process and contribute to our goal of getting more Albertans immunized faster. More details will be available at [ahs.ca/covidvaccine](https://ahs.ca/covidvaccine) next week.

With supply becoming more available and delivery schedules being firmer, AHS is doing everything possible to immunize as many people as possible with the available vaccines, including vaccinating on New Year's Day.

Immunizations are taking place across every zone, every day.

To ensure we are able to provide COVID-19 immunization to as many Albertans as quickly as possible, AHS is actively recruiting additional staff to join our team of immunizers. In addition to our public health immunizers, we are also actively recruiting other groups such as healthcare providers, healthcare retirees, undergraduate nurses and community pharmacists to provide immunizations across the province.

This will assist in the provincial rollout of vaccine and help us meet our targets of immunizing as many Albertans as quickly as possible.

We cannot thank our healthcare teams enough for all of their hard work and dedication. We especially want to recognize the many staff involved in the COVID-19 immunization rollout and sincerely appreciate the long hours and commitments you are making to help protect our staff, patients and public against COVID-19.

### **Special Year End Video Message with Verna, Premier Kenney and Health Minister Shandro**

At the end of an extraordinary year in healthcare across the globe, we have taken the time to reflect on the pandemic in Alberta. There is no doubt that COVID-19 has impacted every Albertan in some way this year, and some of those moments and experiences will be etched in our memories for the rest of our lives. I had the opportunity to discuss Alberta's response to the pandemic with Premier Jason Kenney and Minister of Health, Tyler Shandro. [They have shared some personal recollections from the past year and their gratitude for all you have done to care for the 4.4 million people who rely on us every day.](#)

As much as we all want to move on, we know that ushering in a new year will not bring the end to the pandemic. Albertans need us more than ever. In this video, we also talk about what our teams can expect from the Government of Alberta and Alberta Health as we move into 2021 with renewed hope.





### **Verna's Weekly Video Message — Role of Advisory Councils**

It will take all of us working together to get through this pandemic. Not just AHS staff, physicians and volunteers, but all Albertans across the province.

In these times, we are grateful for our advisory councils, as they are one of our best channels for connecting with Albertans.

Advisory councils include community members across Alberta who bring grassroots advice from their communities to AHS, and their work continues to be invaluable during this pandemic.

Joining me (Verna) to [tell us more about the role of advisory councils and their members](#) are:

- Jen Kneller, Chair, Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression Provincial Advisory Council.
- Carole Tkach, Chair, David Thompson Health Advisory Council.



Jen and Carole discuss the difference between the health advisory and provincial advisory councils, how COVID-19 has impacted their work, and what is in store for the councils in 2021.

**Straight Talk from You — ‘I Got Scared ... We Are Trained to Not Be Scared’**

Straight Talk is a video series in which healthcare workers talk from the heart about what they’re seeing and experiencing at work and in their communities, as COVID-19 spreads across the province. AHS is posting a new Straight Talk video every day on YouTube and sharing it through our AHS accounts on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Please feel free to share these with your networks and on your social platforms as you see appropriate.

This week, we highlight a video featuring Ashlyn Fauchon, a respiratory therapist at the Stollery Children’s Hospital in Edmonton.



“I have seen very serious cases come into emerg and not make it out. It’s that quick. That took me back,” she says. “I got scared, honestly, as an RT, and we are trained to not be scared. People need to take (COVID-19) very seriously.”

You can see all of the [Straight Talk videos](#), and new ones daily, on the AHS website.

### **Photos of the Year**

Every week, we highlight a photo in this space that illustrates your efforts, compassion and achievements as we respond to the pandemic and support Albertans who come to us for care. This week, we are sharing some of the photos from the past year, which represent some of the many moments in 2020 which capture how you worked to protect Albertans from COVID-19.



When news of the pandemic grew, AHS staff were quick to mobilize, offering COVID-19 testing to Albertans across the province.



ICU physician Dr. Simon Demers-Marcil calls a family to tell them a family member died of COVID-19.



Eight-year-old unicorn Alizah Lewis gets creative with art specialist Deb Wozny



The Alberta Precision Labs team processed thousands of COVID-19 tests in 2020.



Rhonda Layos, LPN, gives baby Nathaniel a cuddle.



Tanya Harvey, ICU nurse is among the first to receive a COVID-19 vaccine.



Josie Dahl, RN at Peter Lougheed Centre (PLC) ICU and a community paramedic for Siksika Health Services, left and Mia Torres, RN at PLC ICU pose after getting their COVID-19 vaccines on Dec. 16, 2020

To see all our AHS photos, visit our [Instagram Gallery](#) on the AHS website.

## Be Well - Be Kind

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### Sharing the Love

#### *Adult day program a 'shining light'*

The Edmonton Zone's continuing care team runs adult day programs that were adapted to provide care and support safely during the pandemic. Recently, the team that works in Sturgeon County received a call from a client's wife. She wanted to express her gratitude for the program and everything the staff have done for clients this year. She specifically appreciates the biweekly touch base from staff, the packages dropped off in their mailbox and the newsletter updates on what is happening. Her husband is able to join virtual programming from the safety of their home and it has helped her immensely as a caregiver. At a time when so many things are challenging, she described the program and its staff as "their shining light."

#### *Thanks for taking our calls*

The Royal Alexandra Hospital switchboard operators work 24/7 for our doctors and nurses, as well as handling all the incoming public calls...they deal with the emotional calls, the doctors' calls, the nurses who need doctors paged, the code phones...they are on the other end of that phone that ends up saving people's lives.

Thank you RAH switchboard operators for doing what you do for your hospital and community. We appreciate you.

- Sheena

### *Lights of Joy*

FORTIS Alberta shared a video which showed them taking time from their regular work to bring light to Albertans in some of our facilities across the province in time for Christmas. Their Lights of Joy campaign asked employees to nominate a senior home in their area to visit. They decorated trees outside 26 senior's centres through their campaign this year. As the lyrics in the song from the video say, it's easy to get caught up in the rush and lose sight of what really matters. FORTIS teams have reminded us to find the light in the December night. Thank you, Fortis Alberta, for all you did to brighten up our facilities for the holidays.



### **Gratitude from Albertans**

Everything you and your colleagues do every day to provide safe quality care to all Albertans is being noticed. Messages of gratitude keep pouring in from across the province and beyond during the COVID-19 pandemic. We want to share a few recent messages of thanks with you — and you can see others on our [Sharing the Love webpage](#).

*I thank you for all of the sacrifices you are all making every single day. I want to thank you as a mother, a daughter, a wife, a niece, a teacher and a friend. The work you are doing is helping to restore people to their health and safety. I think of you caring for the sick and smiling with your eyes through all of the PPE. I can promise you that my family is going to do the right thing this holiday season. We will not get together with friends and family in person; we will only go out when it is essential, and we will wear our masks and wash our hands. When the vaccine is available, my family will be getting it. You are heroes making tremendous sacrifices each day. It*



*is the least we can do. I have so many former students who are in healthcare. It makes me burst with pride. My family sends their love and strength to you.*

- Anonymous

*Thank you so much for working so hard to protect us. You all make us feel so much safer. We are all so lucky that you all exist and putting other people's needs in front of all of yours. You all risk your lives for everyone else. You all work so many more hours and that really helps the world stay safer and that all helped other people have less worries when going to the store. Thank you so much for making the world a better place.*

- Cruz

*This Christmas morning I'm thinking of, and grateful for, all the health professionals and staff who have already been giving so much of themselves, but also sacrificing your family time to help those in need of medical services. Not just those looking after the COVID-19 patients, but those dealing with the long-term stay patients, the emergency room patients. The people who often don't get recognized: EMTs, kitchen workers, cleaning staff and volunteers. To you all, thank you for looking after us. You are truly appreciated.*

- Trevor

*Thank for your amazing courage to save lives. Without you amazing people this pandemic would have been the scariest 2020 real life film ever. Thank you again.*

- Randy McMullen

*Thank you doesn't begin to tell you all how much you are appreciated for your relentless commitments to this "war" we are all battling. You are our army, our soldiers, our heroes, who are strong and brave! Praying for you all to be safe in this fight and come back home to your families very soon. May God bless you all and protect you always!*

- Deanna

### **Wrapping Up — Thanks for 2020; Hope for 2021**

How do we adequately capture all that has happened this year in a brief note? How can we properly share our heartfelt thanks for what every person in this organization has done to manage COVID-19 in our province? There are truly no words to express what we feel, but we sincerely want to try. In the early months of this year, without fully knowing what you were facing, each member of our great team jumped in without hesitation to give their all to protect Albertans, our patients and each other. As it evolved, it became clear we were facing the most serious and widespread pandemic since 1918, but you unwaveringly embraced very difficult protocols and adapted your routines, hours and lives to meet the needs of those around us. You worked long hours and sacrificed time with families and friends. You found innovative ways to connect at work and at home. You shared your love and appreciation for your colleagues as we dug in to keep this pandemic

at bay. As Albertans continue to face tough times in this pandemic, you continue to come to work every day to care for them, and their loved ones, when families and friends can't be at their sides. You have mourned personal losses and grieved for your patients. You have been leaders and examples in our province. And now, with the promise of an end to this pandemic through the vaccines making their way to our teams, there is hope in sight on this long road.

In this last message of the year, we offer our most sincere thanks for your enduring strength and commitment to healthcare in our province. We have been humbled by your efforts every single day of this fight. As we move into 2021, we are mindful of the many losses Albertans have suffered as loved ones were taken by COVID-19 in 2020, and we are kindling the glimmer of light that will bring a brighter future in this year ahead for our province. As we close the year, we will celebrate you and all you have accomplished over these incredibly challenging months for healthcare, and we simply say: thank you.



With enduring gratitude and appreciation,

**Dr. Verna Yiu**  
AHS President & CEO

**Dr. Laura McDougall**  
Senior Medical Officer of Health

