



Message from Dr. Verna Yiu & Dr. Laura McDougall

AHS Update: Omicron cases grow in Alberta, new AHS board chair announced

Please print and share with your teams as needed

Dear staff, physicians and volunteers,

Today's Update

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We would like to recognize that our work takes place on historical and contemporary Indigenous lands, including the territories of Treaties 6, 7 & 8, and the homeland of the Métis. We also acknowledge the many Indigenous communities that have been forged in urban centres across Alberta.

Supports When You Need Them

Learn more about the importance of wellness during this time of year

Wellness is more than just improving your physical health; it is also about your emotional and mental well-being. Take advantage of learning opportunities to help support positive mental health for you and your teams, especially during this stressful time of year. Check out the [Wellness Seminar Series](#) schedule and register on [MyLearning Link](#). Managers can also [schedule a wellness or COVID-19 seminar](#) for their team.

Some of the courses available weekly include Self-Compassion, The Fundamentals of Change and Transition, COVID-19: What is Languishing and Why is it Important?, and Getting to Know Your Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP).

If you feel overwhelmed by any issue, you can call the [EFAP](#) intake line 24/7/365 at 1-877-273-3134. This is a confidential service.

Physicians can contact the [AMA Physician and Family Support Program](#), also a confidential 24/7 support line at 1-877-SOS-4MDS for options and support.

There are many ways we can support you through these challenging time. See the [Resilience, Wellness and Mental Health Resource Guide](#) for a comprehensive list of health and wellness supports. Questions? Contact wellness@ahs.ca

COVID-19 Status

ICU Capacity Update

AHS continues to do all it can to ensure we have enough ICU capacity to meet patient demand.

With pressure easing slightly on our ICUs, we are reducing the available surge beds so that we can redeploy staff back to caring for non-COVID-19 patients who need surgeries and procedures completed.

We will ensure that we maintain ICU capacity above daily demand to a planned

maximum of 380 beds as long as staff and physician availability allows, and will readjust our plans as needed if COVID-19 cases rise again.

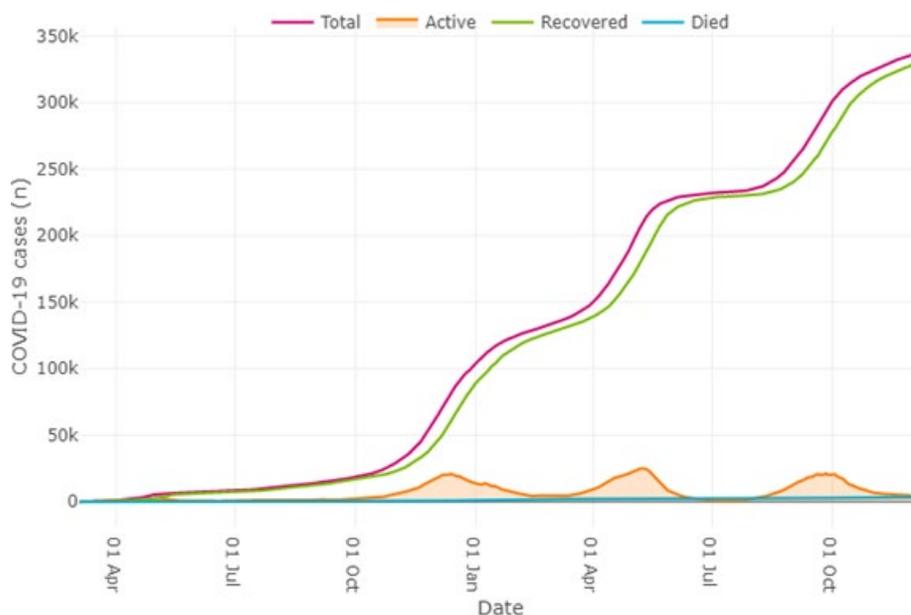
We currently have 228 general adult ICU beds open in Alberta, including 55 additional spaces above our baseline of 173 general adult ICU beds. There are currently 187 patients in ICU.

Provincially, ICU capacity (including additional surge beds) is currently at 82 per cent. Without the additional surge spaces, provincial ICU capacity would be at 108 per cent.

New and Active Cases

For the seven-day period ending on Dec. 8, there was an average of 301 new cases of COVID-19 per day, compared to 313 cases per day the previous week (Nov. 25 to Dec. 1), a 3.8 per cent decrease. The North and South zones were the only zones to report a decrease in the number of new cases per day with a 39.1 per cent and 15.8 per cent decrease, respectively. Central Zone reported the largest increase in new cases per day with 40 new cases per day, compared to 35 new cases per day the previous week (Nov. 25 to Dec. 1). For the second week in a row, Calgary Zone reported the highest total number of new cases with 887 (an average of 127 new cases per day).

As of Dec. 8, there are 4,094 active cases in Alberta, a 9.8 per cent decrease compared to Dec. 1. Most zones reported a decrease in active cases, the zone with the largest reported decrease was North Zone, down 33.6 per cent from Dec. 1. For the tenth week in a row, Calgary Zone reported the most active cases with 1,682. Edmonton Zone was the only zone that did not report a decrease in active cases compared to the last report.

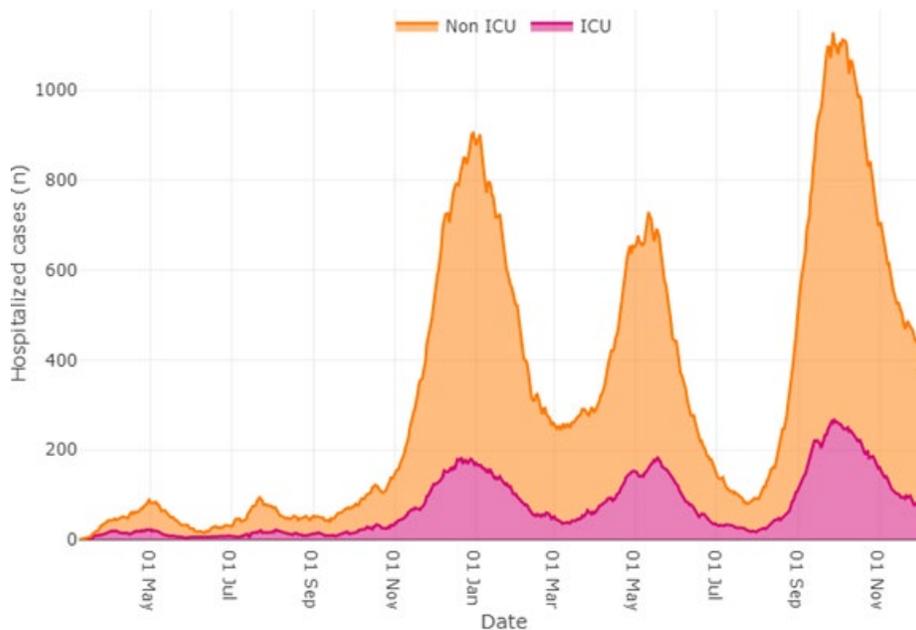


Hospitalizations

A total of 298 individuals were in non-ICU hospital beds for COVID-19 on Dec. 8, compared to 347 individuals in non-ICU hospital beds on Dec. 1, a 14.1 per cent decrease.

The breakdown of hospitalizations by zone as of Dec. 8 is below:

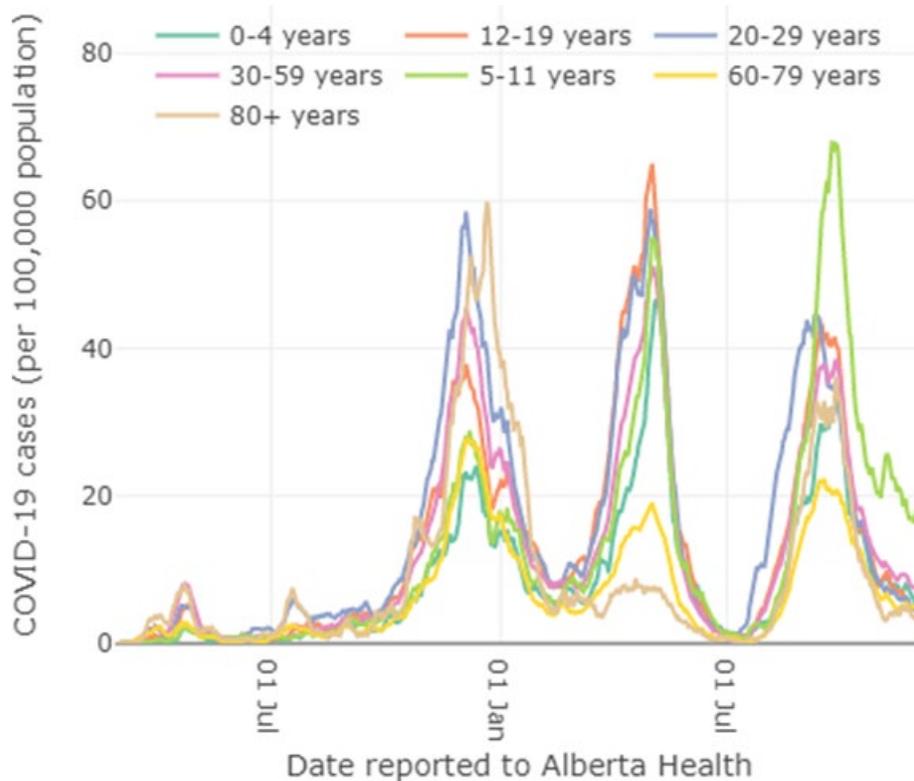
- 125 hospitalizations with 38 of those in ICUs in Edmonton Zone
- 104 hospitalizations with 17 of those in ICUs in Calgary Zone
- 67 hospitalizations with 6 of those in ICUs in Central Zone
- 43 hospitalizations with 4 of those in ICUs in North Zone
- 29 hospitalizations with 5 of those in ICUs in the South Zone



As of Dec. 8, 3,271 individuals have passed away from COVID-19 including 14 deaths since the last report. We extend our condolences to the families of these individuals, and to all who have lost loved ones from any cause during this time.

Cases by Age Group

As of Dec. 5, children aged five to 11 – who were, until recently, ineligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine – had the highest seven-day rolling average of new daily COVID-19 cases again this week, with 19.14 cases per 100,000 children. Albertans aged 30 to 59 had the second-highest rate with 6.71 cases per 100,000 people. Trends in cases in Alberta by age group are shown below:



Variants of Concern

For variants of concern, the lab ended targeted screening of positive samples for strain-typing on Nov. 23. From Nov. 30 to Dec. 6, the average per cent of positive samples that were strain-typed was 92 per cent. Of those strain-typed the rolling average was 99.0 per cent Delta variant, 0.8 per cent Omicron variant, and 0.2 per cent wild type. Details regarding the Omicron variant in Alberta are outlined below. Strain-typing takes a number of days and these numbers may change as lab data becomes available.

Omicron Variant Cases in Alberta

This week, Alberta Health announced additional cases of the Omicron variant in Alberta bringing the total number of cases to 17.

While we are still learning about this variant, early evidence suggests there may be an increased risk of transmission and re-infection, so people who have been previously infected with COVID-19 could be re-infected more easily. There is no evidence of increased disease severity yet, however, evidence is still emerging.

The Government of Canada has implemented [enhanced border measures](#) for all travellers who have been in 10 African countries within 14 days before arriving in Canada, as a precautionary measure.

Omicron’s Impact on AHS Staff and Current Guidance

All international travellers, including AHS staff, arriving in Canada must ensure they are aware of, understand, and comply with all federal requirements regarding COVID-19.

Please continue to use the [Fit for Work](#) and [Return to Work](#) guides, which consider international travel and advise appropriate action.

Please also continue to adhere to provincial measures and precautions in place: all current guidance and algorithms consider international travel and advise appropriate precautions.

AHS to Notify Close Contacts of Omicron Cases

With the Omicron variant identified in Alberta, contact tracing for all close contacts of cases who are positive, or suspected to be positive with the Omicron variant, will now take place.

AHS stopped contact tracing for close contacts in August 2021. Due to the Omicron variant, AHS is re-introducing the process to those potentially exposed to this highly contagious new variant to recommend they get a COVID-19 test, and to provide further instructions. Contact notifications will also occur for close contacts of COVID-19 cases who have recently travelled outside of Canada and the United States where it hasn't been determined yet if they are positive for the Omicron variant.

AHS will notify these Albertans with a phone call, letter or text message. These close contacts will be asked to monitor for symptoms, and if they develop symptoms, to isolate, and be tested right away.

Albertans who are a close contact of an Omicron positive case or an international traveller, and who are not fully immunized, are recommended to stay home and avoid going to public places until at least 14 days have passed since the last close contact with the person who tested positive with COVID-19.

For more information about contact tracing and getting a COVID-19 test, visit the [AHS website](#).

Other notable COVID-19-related information

- As of Dec. 8, a total of 338,141 cases of COVID-19 have been detected in Alberta and a total of 15,228 individuals have ever been hospitalized, which amounts to 4.5 individuals for every 100 cases. In all, 330,776 Albertans have recovered from COVID-19, meaning they are no longer considered contagious.
- From Dec. 2 to Dec. 8, 56,439 COVID-19 tests were completed, an average of 8,063 tests per day. During this period, the daily positivity ranged from 3.55 per cent to 4.41 per cent. As of Dec. 8, a total of 6,202,409 tests have been conducted and 2,601,747 individuals have ever been tested.
- The R value, also known as the reproduction number, describes the ability of a

disease to spread. It tells us the average number of people that someone with COVID-19 will infect. An R value of 1 means an infected person will infect one other person on average. Values below 1 mean transmission is decreasing; above 1, transmission is increasing. The R value is updated every two weeks. From Nov. 15 to Nov. 28 the provincewide R value was 0.88 and the previously reported value was 0.92. The R value was not updated this week.

- Public reporting of outbreaks in schools continues and you can find more information, [here](#).

Appointment of New AHS Board Chair

As announced by [Alberta Health](#) on Dec. 9, Minister of Health, Jason Copping, has appointed Gregory Turnbull, QC, to the [position of AHS Board Chair](#) for a three-year term, effective Dec. 8.

We want to thank David Weyant, QC, AHS's former Board Chair, who recently resigned to pursue other opportunities and interests. We are grateful for David's contributions during his time as Board Chair, with two years spent helping AHS navigate the pandemic, and for his ongoing dedication to serving Albertans.

As a former partner with McCarthy Tétrault LLP, Greg has more than 35 years of experience in corporate governance. He has acted as director, officer and counsel to boards and special committees, including in the medical sector.

Greg is currently a member of the Advisory Council at the School of Public Policy and the Dean's Advisory Council at the Cumming School of Medicine, University of Calgary. He is also a long-term member of the Calgary Health Foundation, where he has most recently served as the Chair of the governance committee.

We look forward to working closely with Greg in the coming months as we develop a shared vision for AHS.

Wastewater Used to Detect COVID-19

Researchers at the University of Alberta and University of Calgary have teamed up to expand their COVID-19 wastewater monitoring programs across the province. The joint effort monitors the wastewater of approximately 3.2 million people or nearly three-quarters of the population of Alberta, via sampling at 17 wastewater treatment plants and facilities across the province. The Government of Alberta has provided \$3.4 million in funding to support the program.

Researchers from University of Calgary are monitoring wastewater treatment plants in Fort McMurray, Airdrie, Canmore, Calgary, Drumheller, Okotoks, Strathmore and Taber, while researchers from University of Alberta's Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry are covering Grande Prairie, Cold Lake, Fort Saskatchewan, Edmonton, Red Deer, Banff, High River, Medicine Hat and Lethbridge.

In total, the wastewater of 25 cities, towns and communities is being monitored for traces of the virus in this way. The program is expected to grow as additional municipalities begin to participate.

Samples will be taken three times a week and results will be shared on the [COVID-19 Data Tracker website](#), which allows members of the public to view recent data points in different communities, to see how cases are trending. Researchers at the Cumming School of Medicine's Centre for Health Informatics have been [providing regular online reporting](#) of the wastewater results from Calgary for nearly a year with publicly available real-time data.

The program builds on [several successful COVID-19 wastewater projects](#) that have been led by teams from the University of Alberta and UCalgary respectively, in partnership with Alberta Health Services, The City of Calgary, and EPCOR.

COVID-19 Immunization Update

Reminder about booster doses

As announced by [Alberta Health](#), additional Albertans 18 years and older will be eligible for a booster dose in a staged approach, starting with those aged 60+. These eligible Albertans can now book appointments for a booster dose of an mRNA vaccine six months after receiving their second dose.

Third doses of COVID-19 vaccine continue to be available to other eligible populations, including frontline healthcare workers who provide direct patient care, had their first two doses of vaccine less than eight weeks apart, and had their second dose at least six months previously. For a full list of all groups that are eligible, visit alberta.ca/vaccine.

The booster dose is not required to be considered fully immunized for the purpose of the AHS' Immunization of Workers for COVID-19 Policy.

Healthcare workers will not be contacted by AHS when they are eligible to receive an additional dose.

Appointments can be made through the [online booking tool](#), [participating clinics](#), pharmacies and doctor's office, or by calling Health Link at 811. Individuals who live on a First Nations reserve can access third doses through local public health clinics on-reserve.

Healthcare workers who are eligible to receive an additional dose and who have their vaccine appointment scheduled during a work shift are eligible for up to three consecutive hours of paid leave. This includes all AHS employees who are full-time, part-time or casual. This does not apply to vaccine appointments that occur outside of work time. Information on time coding for vaccine appointments can be found on

the [Time Management Resources](#) page on Insite.

Misinformation on Vaccine

This week, a social media post relating to the COVID-19 vaccine and alleged hospital admissions of children related to the vaccine, made its rounds on Twitter.

AHS responded to the post to ensure Albertans know we support and encourage the administration of COVID-19 vaccine for all eligible age groups. As well, AHS clarified that we are not seeing hospital admissions related to the vaccine in the 5 to 11 age group.

In Alberta, more than 64,000 children between the ages of 5 – 11 have received their vaccine. Close to seven million vaccine doses have been provided to Albertans in all age groups. Of these, just over 2,000 individuals have reported an adverse event, most of which have been mild to moderate and include rash, or pain and swelling where the needle was given.

We encourage everyone to review current, credible evidence to make the best and most informed decision about your health. This includes garnering information for patients and clients from reliable source. In addition to the AHS site, we recommend:

- Vaccines for Children: [Health Canada](#) and the [Canadian Pediatric Society](#)
- [Alberta Health](#)
- Health Canada ([Debunking Myths](#) and [NACI Recommendations](#))
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)

Vaccine Rollout to Ages 5 – 11 Continues

Appointments continue to be available for those aged 5-11 across the province at AHS immunization clinics and select pharmacies.

Appointments must be booked [online](#) or by calling Health Link at 811. Children who live on a First Nations reserve can access doses through the nursing stations or public health clinics on-reserve.

Alberta Health has recommended that the interval between first and second doses should be at least eight weeks. It is recommended, but not required, to wait for a period of at least 14 days before and after the administration of the COVID-19 pediatric vaccine and the administration of another vaccine. Routine school immunizations can be administered regardless of spacing from the COVID-19 vaccine.

Vaccine availability

AstraZeneca - Currently, there is no supply of the AstraZeneca vaccine in the province. Additional supply is expected later in December. Individuals requiring

second doses of AstraZeneca should call Health Link to get on a wait list for notification when the vaccine has arrived. We will keep you updated as more information becomes available.

Janssen (Johnson and Johnson) - The Janssen vaccine continues to be available for Albertans 18 years of age and older. Due to limited supply, the vaccine is only administered at AHS clinics in select locations across the province. Call Health Link at 811 to book an appointment.

The Janssen vaccine is now available for individuals with a contraindication to currently available COVID-19 vaccines. This includes people who have had a dose of COVID-19 vaccine previously and had a serious adverse reaction. A minimum of 28 days from any previously received COVID-19 vaccine is required. Only one dose of the Janssen vaccine is needed to be fully immunized.

mRNA vaccines continue to be recommended as the most safe and effective vaccine choice, for all those that are able to receive them. Individuals without a contraindication to an mRNA vaccine, who have been immunized with a single dose of Janssen as their only vaccine, are recommended to have a booster dose of mRNA vaccine after six months.

Things You Need to Know

Influenza Immunization Update

As of Dec. 4, 1,016,859 doses of influenza vaccine have been administered, which is about 23 per cent of the population.

One additional influenza case was identified this past week, leaving the total at six confirmed cases of influenza, so far this season.

Although the influenza activity we are seeing right now is less than we would see in a typical season, with changes to public health restrictions, more people travelling, and as more activities move indoors during the winter season, we can expect to see a rise in the number of Albertans with respiratory symptoms and other illnesses, including seasonal influenza.

Now more than ever we need Albertans to get immunized against influenza, to protect themselves, their families and community.

For more information on influenza, visit ahs.ca/influenza. Interactive aggregate data is available online at [Alberta influenza statistics](#).

Influenza immunization information for staff, physicians and volunteers

Staff, physicians and volunteers can choose to be immunized through a site

champion on their unit or another nearby, a roving cart at their site where available, as well as a pharmacy, doctor's office or public health clinic.

Staff using these options are reminded to submit their [Got My Flu Shot form](#). See [Insite](#) for more on the staff immunization campaign.

Work with Your Leader to Confirm Remote Work Options by March 31

As previously announced, AHS has developed a strategy that would enable post-pandemic remote and hybrid work arrangements to continue for eligible staff. Leaders will be given more information and resources to engage in discussions about remote work options with eligible staff in the coming weeks and months, and will be asked to confirm work arrangements for eligible employees by Mar. 31, 2022, wherever possible.

Earlier this year, AHS asked that all staff who are able to work remotely within their roles continue to do so until at least the end of December. Please note that Government of Alberta's [mandatory work-from-home measure](#) is still in effect, requiring employees to work from home unless a physical presence is required for operational effectiveness.

Employees should continue to work remotely until their work arrangements are confirmed by their leader and until all work from home measures have been relaxed. AHS will continue to communicate with staff about this mandatory measure and any additional remote-work guidance, as needed.

Your leader will follow up with more information about the remote-hybrid work arrangement strategy when appropriate.

Verna's Weekly Message: Spotlight on Pharmacy Services

We often talk about the challenges and pressure brought about by this pandemic, but the adversity of COVID-19 has also provided the opportunity for AHS teams to demonstrate innovation and resilience.

Over the past 20 months, there have been many accomplishments to celebrate from teams across the organization. One of those teams is Pharmacy Services.

From ordering drugs and keeping them stocked in hospitals around the province, to testing and releasing new drugs as research becomes available, the Pharmacy Services team has done some incredible work.

[Joining me \(Verna\) to tell us more](#) are:

- Tracey Simpson, Director, Procurement, Inventory and Service Performance, Pharmacy Services
- Jeremy Slobodan, Director, Drug Utilization, Information & Stewardship, Pharmacy Services



Emergency Wait Times Now Online Across Edmonton Zone

Real-time [estimated wait times are now available online for all emergency departments in the Edmonton Zone](#), including urgent care services, giving Albertans another tool to help them decide where to access care for themselves and their families.

This week, wait times for the emergency department at the Devon General Hospital, and urgent care services at the East Edmonton Health Centre were added to complete the list of Edmonton Zone hospitals on the [AHS website](#) and the [AHS mobile app](#).

Online estimated emergency department wait times were first posted for hospitals and urgent care centres in the Calgary Zone in July 2011, and then in the Edmonton Zone in June 2012, followed by the Red Deer Regional Hospital in early 2016 and the Medicine Hat Regional Hospital and Chinook Regional Hospital in Lethbridge in September 2017.

Be Well - Be Kind

Gratitude from Albertans

Albertans notice what you are doing every day to provide safe, quality care across the province. Messages of gratitude keep coming in to let us know how appreciated you are —we've shared some of those below. To see more of these encouraging submissions, please visit our Sharing the Love webpage.

Thank you to all the healthcare workers that have done so much over the course of the pandemic going above and beyond!

—Sarah Burgess

Thank you so much for all you do for our communities. You are forever appreciated.

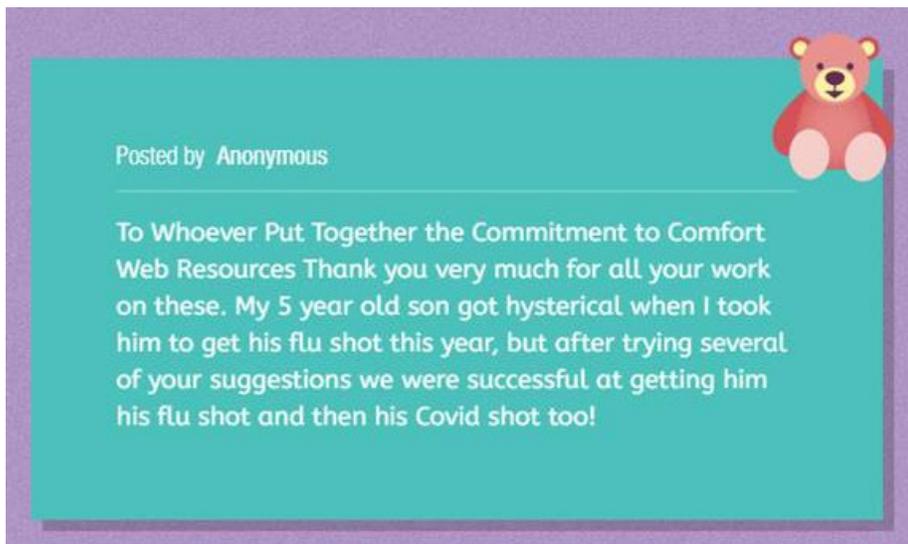
—Anonymous

Thank you for being our true heroes.

—Carmen Ma

Thank you to everyone that continues to show up and care for patients. I'm sorry the last two years have been so hard on you all. You're doing amazing!

—Anonymous



Wrapping Up — Pandemic Positives

It is so easy and understandable to lament the toll this pandemic has taken on us. Together, we have endured much and persevered through some very heavy months, but this week, as we draw closer to the end of this year, we want to reflect on some of the opportunities COVID-19 has provided.

- As we noted with our Pharmacy Services above, we have all exponentially grown our resilience and ability to adapt to ever-changing circumstances.
- We have developed creative approaches to providing care and conducting our daily work, in ways we never would have, had we not been tested by the demands of the pandemic.
- In the midst of vitriol and misinformation, we have seen tenderness and understanding, like nothing we have ever experienced.
- While being separate, we have been deliberate and intentional about connecting with others, which has nurtured relationships.
- We have been collectively open to new ideas and shown our vulnerability with each other in the most overwhelming moments.
- We have seen you demonstrate remarkable compassion, reminding us of the goodness of humanity.

We are so thankful for these experiences and all that they've taught us in the past 21 months, and as always, we are thankful for you and your dedication to healthcare in Alberta.

With enduring gratitude and appreciation,

Dr. Verna Yiu

AHS President & CEO

Dr. Laura McDougall

Senior Medical Officer of Health

