



Message from
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AHS Update: Expanding Access to Surgery in Central and South Zones, Commemorating National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, Learn how to Create Inclusive Spaces for Virtual Care

Please print and share with your teams as needed

Dear staff, physicians and volunteers,

 Today's Update

- **Action on Our 10 Priorities**
- **Supports When You Need Them**
- **COVID-19 Cases in Alberta**
- **Commemorating National Day for Truth and Reconciliation**
- **Interim CEO Video Message — A Conversation with a Living Donor**
- **PPE Question of the Week**
- **Webinar: Learn how to Create Inclusive Spaces for Virtual Care**
- **Celebrate Healthcare Simulation Week**
- **Gratitude from Albertans**
- **Wrapping Up — the Importance of Wellness**

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.

Action on Our 10 Priorities

The AHS Update message includes the latest information on our COVID-19 response, as well as updates on the progress AHS is making on its [10 priority areas](#). Each edition will include updates on specific initiatives connected to some of the 10 priorities. We have much to accomplish together in these areas, so we want to make sure our teams have the most current information on the work underway and on the work ahead.

Priority: Alberta Surgical Initiative (ASI)

The ASI will improve timely access to surgical care in Alberta. The goal of ASI is to ensure adult and pediatric patients receive scheduled surgeries within clinically appropriate timeframes.

Surgical Wait List Status Update

We continue to work diligently to recover to pre-pandemic surgical status. Over the past four weeks, the average weekly volume for surgical activity is 92 per cent of our pre-pandemic surgical volumes. The surgical wait list for adults sits at approximately 73,473, compared with about 68,000 in February 2020, before the pandemic.

- Approximately 101,500 surgeries have been completed in the 2022/23 fiscal year.

AHS Seeking to Expand Access to Surgery in Central and South Zones

As [announced by the Government of Alberta](#) on Sept. 7, AHS is seeking to increase opportunities for Albertans to receive surgical care in their communities through requests for proposals (RFP) for chartered surgical facilities (CSF) in the Central and South zones. The RFPs seek a minimum of approximately 1,350 surgical procedures per year at CSFs in the Central Zone, and 1,250 in the South Zone.

These changes will improve access, reduce wait times for surgery for patients and help Albertans receive their procedure in their community. This work builds on an [earlier announcement](#) of over 30,000 contracted ophthalmology procedures launched in April 2022, and [over 6,000 orthopedic surgeries](#), as well as other strategies as part of the ASI.

AHS will provide more information on ahs.ca/asi as it is available.

Centralized referrals launch in Alberta

As part of the ASI, a new central access and intake program for managing non-urgent referrals called Alberta Facilitated Access to Specialized Treatment (FAST) is rolling out across the province. FAST has launched for the following:

- [North Zone – Orthopaedics and urology](#)
- [Central Zone – Orthopaedics, urology and cataracts](#)
- [South Zone – Urology \(orthopaedics launch Oct. 19\)](#)

Calgary Zone will launch Oct. 11 for urology and orthopaedics. The existing Edmonton Zone FAST program continues to be the central intake for referrals to general surgery, plastics, ENT/otolaryngology, colposcopy, shoulder, upper limb, hand/wrist and elbow. Edmonton Zone FAST will expand to include all orthopaedic referrals on Oct. 31.

A few benefits of the program:

- One toll free fax number for non-urgent urology and orthopaedics referrals
- When referring, providers can choose:
 - Next available provider with the shortest waitlist
 - A specific provider by name
 - An out-of-Zone referral
- Each referral is checked for completeness before being sent to the specialist
- A more predictable and timely surgical journey for patients and providers

Referring providers, find out how you can start using FAST. It is as easy as changing a fax number: ahs.ca/specialtyaccess. Specialists in urology and orthopaedics, to start receiving referrals through FAST, email ABFAST@ahs.ca.

Surgical Waitlist Management

AHS is expanding a waitlist validation project initially piloted in Edmonton Zone to manage the surgical waitlist across the province. Over the next few months, patients listed for surgery in the South and Calgary zones will receive a phone call or voicemail from a member of the AHS Surgery Waitlist Management Team.

As part of the process to confirm wait list status, our team will ask for each patient's provincial personal health number and birthdate to confirm their identity. Patients who hang up or do not call the number back will not see their position on the waitlist affected.

Patients are reminded AHS will never ask for financial information or for any personal information other than your provincial personal health number or birthdate during these automated calls.

More information and a full script of the automated call is available on the AHS website ahs.ca/waitlist.

Supports When You Need Them

Learn More About Your Emotional and Mental Health

Want to learn more about your health? Try out the Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP) health risk assessment (HRA) which offers an assessment on your health history, lifestyle habits and emotional health like work-life balance and stress.

When you log on to Homeweb, click 'tools' to access the HRA assessment of your health history and lifestyle habits. It also helps you identify your health and wellness barriers.

To support your health and well-being, contact the [EFAP](#) intake line at 1-877-273-3134. Physicians can contact the [AMA Physician and Family Support Program](#), a confidential 24/7 support line at 1-877-SOS-4MDS for options and support.

See the [Resilience, Wellness and Mental Health Resource Guide](#) for a comprehensive list of health and wellness supports. You can also download [Headversity](#), the resilience app, to learn skills to proactively build your mental health. Questions? Contact wellness@ahs.ca.

COVID-19 Status

Hospitalizations & ICU Update

As of Sept. 5:

- 799 individuals were in non-ICU hospital beds with COVID-19 compared to 838 individuals in non-ICU hospital beds on August 23, a 4.7 per cent decrease
- 20 individuals were in ICU hospital beds with COVID-19 compared to 32 individuals in ICU hospital beds on August 23, a 37.5 per cent decrease

Variants of Concern

APL continues to closely monitor SARS-CoV-2 variants. From Aug. 30 – Sept. 5, an average of 67 per cent of positive samples were strain-typed. Of those, the seven-day rolling average was 2 per cent Omicron BA.2 lineage, 7 per cent Omicron BA.4 lineage, and 91 per cent Omicron BA.5 lineage. As global data is updated, sub-lineage designations are refined which may affect lineage calls in Alberta. We continue to monitor our data and adjust as information becomes available. While BA.4 and BA.5 appear to transmit more readily than BA.2 due to their ability to evade immunity from immunization or prior infection, there is no evidence that they cause more severe disease than other Omicron lineages.

Wastewater Surveillance

Wastewater can provide an early indication of infection trends in a community. For

wastewater surveillance comparing weekly averages:

- Four sites increased by more than 25 percent compared to the weekly average two weeks ago. These sites were Taber, Airdrie, Lacombe and Fort McMurray. The other 16 sites decreased or had no significant changes. These observations were made on Sept. 6 at 8 a.m.

Frequency of reporting updates varies by sampling site. The Alberta Wastewater Surveillance Program is a collaboration between the University of Calgary, University of Alberta, APL and Alberta Health.

Other notable COVID-19-related information:

- As of Sept. 5, 4,832 individuals have passed away from COVID-19 including 84 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
- As of Sept. 5, a total of 29,677 individuals have been hospitalized with COVID-19 in Alberta.
- From Aug. 23 - Sept. 5, 14,279 COVID-19 tests were completed, a 14-day average of 1,020 tests per day. During this period, the daily positivity ranged from 15.0 per cent to 21.5 per cent

Things You Need to Know

Commemorating National Day for Truth and Reconciliation

On Sept. 30, we wear orange to recognize the history and truthful impacts of residential schools in Alberta. The Orange Shirt Day movement started in 2013 after a [Residential School Survivor spoke](#) about having the orange shirt her grandmother bought for her taken away on her first day of school when she was six years old.

In 2021, Orange Shirt Day became the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. As Sept. 30 will be a statutory holiday, AHS will be commemorating the day with reflective sessions on [Thursday, Sept. 29](#). We encourage everyone to honour Sept. 30 as a day of personal reflection or to take part in events in your community.

In the days leading up to the **National Day for Truth and Reconciliation**, we encourage you to put reconciliation into action. Join us on [Insite](#) and [Together4Health](#) throughout this month and take part in our online activities.

The AHS Indigenous Wellness Core has compiled a list of ideas to encourage you on your personal reconciliation journey. You can share what [allyship](#) means to you and how [your community](#) will be commemorating this day.

Interim CEO Video Message: A Conversation with a Living Donor

Each year, living donor transplants save the lives of hundreds of Canadians awaiting a

liver or kidney transplant. Living organ donation offers a shorter pathway to better health with shorter wait times and better health outcomes.

What you might not know is that AHS has a Living Organ Donor Wage Replacement Policy that grants employees a paid leave of absence and continuation of benefits to help reduce the economic hardships associated with living donation.

Recently, I (Mauro) had the chance to sit down in person with Anne Halpin, a laboratory scientist with Alberta Precision Laboratories, [who shared her inspiring story about donating a kidney and how she was supported by the policy.](#)







If you want to learn more about the [Living Organ Donor Wage Replacement Policy](#), check out the FAQs for [employees](#) and [managers](#). For information on organ and tissue donation, as well as living donation, visit the [MyHealth Alberta](#) website.

PPE Question of the Week: What Criteria is Used When Making the Decision to Keep Continuous Masking in Place?

From wastewater data, to the positivity rate, to the number of inpatients in our beds and ICUs, many factors go into the decision of whether to keep continuous masking in place at AHS facilities. [Dr. Mark Joffe discusses some of these factors and how this important decision is made.](#)

PPE Question of the Week

What criteria is used when making the decision to keep continuous masking in place? 



Dr. Mark Joffe answers PPE question of the week.

Webinar: Learn how to Create Inclusive Spaces for Virtual Care

Inclusion is what we do and how we treat each other. It is our flexibility and willingness to listen, learn and collaborate to build safe places for everyone. [Virtual Health](#) is pleased to welcome the [Diversity & Inclusion team](#) to share what equity, diversity and inclusion considerations we should be making in the delivery of virtual care.

Date: Tuesday, Sept. 20
Time: Noon - 12:45 p.m.

[Register here.](#)

Celebrate Healthcare Simulation Week

Join us in celebrating Healthcare Simulation Week from Sept. 12 - 16. By supporting our healthcare professionals in improving their skills, we help them deliver the best health outcomes for their patients. Simulation offers dynamic opportunities to improve education throughout the healthcare system. [Learn more](#) and watch for more stories next week.

Be Well - Be Kind

Gratitude from Albertans

Everything you and your colleagues do every day to provide safe quality care to Albertans is being noticed. Messages of gratitude keep coming in from across the province and beyond during the COVID-19 pandemic. You can read a recent message of gratitude below — and you can see more on our [Sharing the Love webpage](#).

Dearest doctors, nurses, interns, (and) support staff. We all are grateful for

your service, work and all the people whose lives you save. Your daily work and patient care protects the vulnerable populations, elderly, and emergency patients who come in for tough and testing cases. May God bless you and guide you all to stay strong (and) find happiness.

• *Anonymous*

Wrapping Up – A Team Effort

This week's Sharing the Love message highlights something very important. That it takes a team to provide quality healthcare and everyone has a role to play. Whether you're a respiratory therapist, nurse, doctor, part of environmental services or someone who works behind the scenes in IT, HR or any other corporate area, your efforts are crucial in maintaining a quality and sustainable healthcare system.

So no matter where you work in Alberta, helping people stay healthy or working behind the scenes, thank you for being part of the larger team and for everything you do, day and night.

With enduring gratitude and appreciation,

Mauro Chies

Interim AHS President & CEO

Dr. Laura McDougall

Senior Medical Officer of Health

