



Message from
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AHS Update: AHS adds 50 new ICU beds, Fit for Work screening update, influenza season approaches

Please print and share with your teams as needed

Dear staff, physicians and volunteers,

Today's Update

- **Our Priorities**
- **Supports When You Need Them**
- **COVID-19 Cases in Alberta**
- **Daily Fit for Work Screening Updated**
- **Interim CEO Video Message — Influenza Season**
- **Bivalent Vaccine Now Available Provincewide for Eligible Albertans**
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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.

Action on Our 10 Priorities

AHS continues to make progress in its [10 priority areas](#). The following are updates on specific initiatives connected to some of the 10 priorities.

Priority: Public Health & Pandemic Response and Recovery

AHS completes addition of 50 new ICU beds

Work is now complete to add 50 additional, fully staffed intensive care unit (ICU) beds in hospitals across the province.

Alberta now has 223 adult general ICU beds, a 29 per cent increase from before the pandemic. AHS has opened the additional beds in every region, using a phased approach, with the support of a \$300-million investment over three years from the Government of Alberta.

Of the 50 new ICU beds:

- Eighteen are in the Edmonton Zone: University of Alberta Hospital, Royal Alexandra Hospital and Sturgeon Community Hospital.
- Thirteen are in the Calgary Zone: Foothills Medical Centre, Peter Lougheed Centre, Rockyview General Hospital and South Health Campus.
- Eight are in the Central Zone's Red Deer Regional Hospital Centre.
- Six are in the South Zone's Chinook Regional Hospital.
- Five are in the North Zone: Grande Prairie Regional Hospital and Northern Lights Regional Hospital.

More information is available on the [government website](#).

New initiative to modernize primary care

This week the Government of Alberta announced a new initiative focused on prioritizing primary healthcare in the province. The initiative, Modernizing Alberta's Primary Health Care System (MAPS), aims to stabilize and strengthen Alberta's primary healthcare system, and will identify innovations that can be implemented to meet Albertans' health needs in the years ahead. For more information, please review the [government announcement](#).

Priority: Alberta Surgical Initiative (ASI)

Surgical wait-list status update

AHS continues to work to recover to pre-pandemic surgical status. Over the past four weeks, the average weekly volume for surgical activity is 98 per cent of our pre-pandemic surgical volumes. The surgical wait list for adults sits at approximately 72,800, compared with about 68,000 in February 2020, before the pandemic. Approximately 122,500 surgeries have been completed in the 2022/23 fiscal year.

Surgical wait-list validation project expands

AHS is expanding a wait-list validation project into Central Zone to manage the surgical wait-list across the province. With this launch, all zones are now conducting this surgical wait-list confirmation work.

Patients listed for surgery will receive a phone call, automated call or voicemail. As part of the process to confirm wait list status, patients will be asked for their provincial personal health number and birthdate to confirm their identity. Patients who hang up or do not call the surgical wait-list team back will not see their position on the wait-list 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. To help patients determine that the call is not a scam, a [webpage](#) has been created outlining the scripts being used for each zone.

Alberta FAST launches in Calgary Zone next week

A new central access and intake program for managing referrals called Alberta Facilitated Access to Specialized Treatment (FAST) will launch in Calgary Zone on Tuesday (Oct. 11). Please note:

- FAST will accept all urology and non-urgent orthopedics and spine referrals (excluding oncological and pediatrics orthopedic) through one central fax number: **1-833-627-7023**.
- Calgary's Urology Central Intake (UCI) program will now become part of FAST.
- Calgary Zone providers, please update your fax numbers on Oct. 11.
- More information is available in this [Calgary Zone one-pager](#).

FAST has already launched in the following zones:

- [North Zone – Orthopedics and urology](#)
- [Central Zone – Orthopedics, urology and cataracts](#)
- [South Zone – Urology \(orthopedics launch Oct. 19\)](#)
- 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 orthopedic referrals on Oct. 31.

More information: ahs.ca/specialtyaccess

Priority: Workforce Recruitment and Retention

Input needed to shape Nursing Workforce Strategy

AHS is developing a Nursing Workforce Strategy to identify actions to address challenges and opportunities with the nursing workforce. The strategy will align with efforts across other key areas of our workforce, including physicians, allied health and nurse practitioners. Driven by the voices of our people, stakeholders and partners, the strategy will help pave our way to building a healthy and sustainable workforce for the years to come.

All nurses, nurse educators, nurse managers and leaders have been asked to share their valued experiences through a survey and/or engagement session.

Visit [Together4Health](#) to learn more about this work. If you have questions, contact acno@ahs.ca.

Alberta Medical Association, Alberta Health ratify new agreement

This week the Government of Alberta announced a new agreement with the Alberta Medical Association (AMA) has been ratified by physicians throughout the province. The agreement will mean an investment of about \$750 million in new funding over four years to stabilize the healthcare system. This includes more than \$250 million in targeted funding to address pressures, including recruitment and retention programs, so more Albertans can access family doctors, and more support for practice viability.

For more information, please review the [announcement](#) or reach out to your medical leader.

Priority: Digital Health Evolution and Innovation

Connect Care update

Connect Care teams are busy with final preparations for Launch 5 on Nov. 6.

This week, the 30-day Launch Readiness Assessment took place. This half-day session provides important status updates to operational leaders (zone, provincial programs, and site leadership, as well as implementation teams, managers, directors, and physician leads), from Connect Care project teams as they prepare to launch.

The full Connect Care Implementation Timeline is available on [Insite](#).

Supports When You Need Them

Support your Mental Health with Online Cognitive Behavioural Therapy

As part of the enhanced [Employee and Family Assistance Program](#) (EFAP) digital experience, you can access [Sentio](#) (formerly i-Volve), online cognitive behavioural therapy which supports mild depression and anxiety.

To access Sentio, create an account on homeweb.ca. You will start with a short online self-assessment which helps customize your care path and allows you to choose treatment goals based on your needs and interests.

EFAP continues to include a full range of health and wellness services, including counselling services and life smart coaching. Call the intake line any time at 1-877-273-3134 if you need further support.

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

Questions? Contact wellness@ahs.ca

COVID-19 Status

Hospitalizations, ICU Update and Other Notable COVID-19-Related Information:

- Unavailable at the source this week.

Variants of Concern

Alberta Precision Laboratories (APL) continues to monitor SARS-CoV-2 variants. From Sept. 27 to Oct. 3, an average of 71 per cent of positive samples were strain-typed. Of those, the seven-day rolling average was two per cent Omicron BA.2 lineage, three per cent Omicron BA.4 lineage, and 95 per cent Omicron BA.5 lineage.

Wastewater Surveillance

Wastewater can provide an early indication of infection trends in a community. Nine sites increased by more than 25 percent compared to the weekly average two weeks ago. These sites were Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Brooks, Canmore, High River, Strathmore, Lacombe, City of Edmonton and Grande Prairie. The other 12 sites decreased or had no significant changes.

Jasper is a new surveillance location, bringing the total number of wastewater surveillance sites to 21.

The above interpretations were made from available data as of Oct. 3 at 9 a.m. The Alberta Wastewater Surveillance Program is a collaboration between the University of Calgary, University of Alberta, APL and Alberta Health.

Things You Need to Know

Daily Fit for Work Screening Update

AHS has updated our [Fit for Work](#) screening to align with Ottawa's removal of COVID-19 entry requirements.

Note the travel question has been removed from the Fit for Work screening tools. Staff, physicians, volunteers, students, vendors and contractors must still comply with the screening requirements established in their workplace.

As we live with COVID-19 and head into the respiratory illness season, workers must continue to follow safety measures including proper hand hygiene, PPE, social distancing where possible, immunization and staying at home when sick to keep everyone safe.

The [Return to Work Guide](#) and [Return to Work Decision Chart](#) have also been updated.

Interim CEO Video Message — Preparing for Influenza Season

Flu season is upon us again, and this year will be the first time both influenza and COVID-19 are circulating in our communities with no public health restrictions. It's important we all continue to take the required precautions to reduce the spread of influenza. By keeping the number of influenza cases and outbreaks low, we can help protect our patients, as well as the more vulnerable populations such as seniors and young children.

Immunization is the most effective way to prevent infection, and to limit the spread of the virus to those around you. We encourage you all to take action and get the flu shot this year.

Joining the [AHS Vlog to tell us more about this year's campaign](#) are:

- Danielle Neave, Director of Workplace Health and Safety Business Partnerships for the North Zone.
- Dr. Robyn Harrison, Provincial Communicable Disease Consultant, Workplace Health & Safety.
- Dr. Kristin Klein, Medical Officer of Health for Provincial Population and Public Health.



Find out more about employee influenza immunization on [Insite](#).

Bivalent Vaccine Now Available Provincewide for Eligible Albertans

The Moderna Bivalent BA.1 vaccine is now available provincewide as an additional booster dose option for Albertans 18 years of age and older.

Albertans are encouraged to receive their Bivalent BA.1 vaccine booster dose at a pharmacy. If their local pharmacy is not listed in the booking system, Albertans can contact the pharmacy directly or visit [Alberta Blue Cross](#) to find a pharmacy near them offering this vaccine option. Appointments may also be available at AHS clinics and can be booked [online](#) or by calling 811.

We encourage all staff to get their influenza immunization and — if they are eligible — a COVID-19 bivalent booster dose at the same time. Workplace Health and Safety clinics (WHS) are offering booked appointments for AHS staff. WHS clinics open the week of Oct. 11. Today Health Canada has approved Pfizer's new bivalent COVID-19 vaccine, which will be eventually offered at WHS clinics along with the Moderna bivalent product that will be available as soon as the WHS immunization clinics commence next week.

See the [Employee Influenza Immunization page](#) for more information or contact a [WHS team member](#).

It is recommended to wait at least five months after last dose, and at least five months after a COVID-19 infection before receiving the Bivalent BA.1 vaccine booster dose. This vaccine triggers a stronger immune response and provides additional protection against both Omicron and the original SARS-CoV-2 virus strain.

Exercise Caution in Common Areas

Many individuals throughout the province are returning to AHS sites either on a part-time or full-time basis, or to attend in-person meetings. When using common spaces such as break rooms, meeting rooms, or washrooms, these simple practices can help ensure the health and safety of yourself, and others around you.

- Continuously mask.
- Practise hand hygiene.
- Be respectful of physical distancing requirements and the personal comfort of others.
- Make virtual meeting options available.
- Avoid attending in-person if you don't feel well.
- Regularly wipe down high-contact areas, such as doorknobs, drawer pulls, coffee pots and appliance handles.

While in common spaces, AHS staff can host and attend in-person meetings provided the above guidelines remain in place.

Food may be consumed, provided all attendees continue to follow the guidelines in the [Decorations, Costumes, Food, Celebrations and Donations Information Sheet](#).

When consuming food and drink in a common meeting space, attendees may have their mask down provided there is adequate space to physically distance.

During an outbreak situation, facilities or units may add additional measures in common meeting spaces to ensure everyone's health and safety.

Thank you for continuing to follow these guidelines as we enter the fall respiratory season and work to keep each other, and all Albertans, safe.

Neurosurgeon Awarded Lifetime Achievement in Health

Dr. Keith Aronyk, the first specialty-trained pediatric neurosurgeon in northern Alberta, is the recipient of the first [Dr. Peter B. R. Allen lifetime achievement award in health](#).

Throughout his career, Dr. Aronyk has worked tirelessly to advance neurological care in Alberta, bringing some of the best doctors and technology in the world to create a centre of excellence for brain care. His efforts have improved treatments for conditions including brain injuries and tumours, stroke, epilepsy, Parkinson's disease and multiple sclerosis. Congratulations to Dr. Aronyk for his vision and commitment to the health of Albertans.

Be Well - Be Kind

Join Session on Moral Distress: Family & Visitor Access Restrictions

Experiences of staff moral distress have increased over the past two years due to the pandemic. One contributing factor has been the restrictions on family and visitor access to patients in AHS care.

On Oct. 27 from 1:30 to 3 p.m., engage with a panel of subject matter experts as they reflect on the restrictions and discuss strategies to address the related moral distress.

[Register for the session](#) to receive the link.

A recording will be posted to the [Clinical Ethics video](#) page following the session. If you have questions, please contact clinicaethics@ahs.ca.

Mental Wellness Moment on Self-Care

As we approach World Mental Health Day on Oct. 10, Dr. Nicholas Mitchell — Provincial Medical Director for Addiction and Mental Health — talks in his latest Mental Wellness Moment about the importance of self-care. When many of us hear about self-care, we think about relaxation and taking time for ourselves. While relaxation can be self-care, [Dr. Mitchell explains the importance of building healthy habits over the long term to support our mental wellness](#).



Wrapping Up

We're heading into the long weekend and want to simply say we are so grateful for all of you, and for your commitment to patients and families. Thank you.

With enduring gratitude and appreciation,

Mauro Chies

Interim AHS President & CEO

Dr. Laura McDougall

Senior Medical Officer of Health

