

Chartered Surgical Facilities Ophthalmology RFP

Background

Alberta Health Services (AHS) issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) seeking an expansion of publicly-funded ophthalmology surgeries with chartered surgical facilities (CSF) that will help manage the increased surgical demand, and expand capacity in particularly high-needs areas, such as cataracts. The RFP will close mid-May 2021, and a contract is expected to be awarded in fall 2021.

Why is AHS moving forward with chartered surgical facilities in Alberta?

Timely access to surgeries is important to Albertans. No one should have to wait longer than clinically recommended for their surgery. AHS is already making gains on the province's surgical backlog, and currently expects to be back to pre-pandemic surgical levels by the fall.

CSFs are an essential means of adding capacity for publicly-funded surgeries as part of the recovery and as part of the Alberta Surgical Initiative (ASI) being implemented to ensure all Albertans receive scheduled surgeries within clinically appropriate wait times.

Was this a recommendation in the AHS Performance Review?

Yes. The AHS Review Report identified a recommendation to expand the use of CSFs across the province. This recommendation is in direct alignment with the ASI, a plan developed by AHS and Alberta Health to ensure all Albertans receive surgeries within clinically appropriate targets. Issuing an ophthalmology chartered surgical facility RFP is one step in the process to increase surgeries for Albertans.

What is the value of the work that is to be contracted out?

A detailed valuation has been conducted as part of developing the RFP and analysis of costs and pricing will be a significant part of the bid evaluation process. We cannot release our valuation estimates publicly at this time, as we do not want to influence the bidding process and the pricing proposals that will be put forward by proponents.

When was the RFP posted? When will it close?

The RFP for ophthalmology chartered surgical facilities was posted April 13, 2021. It will close mid-May 2021, and a contract will likely be awarded in the fall of 2021.

What is the RFP process?

Alberta Health has established a Health Contracting Secretariat (HCS) based on a recommendation from the AHS Review Report completed by EY, to provide AHS with expert advice in the development of the RFP.

This competitive process is meant to explore mutual benefits between AHS and CSFs in building out a service delivery model which meets overall objectives and wait-time targets. Although the HCS provides expert advice for the RFP process, the final decision will be made by AHS.

How do you know there will be interested and qualified parties to deliver surgeries at these facilities?

In January 2020, AHS issued a Request for Expressions of Interest (RFEOI) which concluded that there were a number of qualified providers interested in delivering surgical procedures across Alberta, supporting the move to a RFP process.

How many more patients will receive surgeries in CSFs?

As part of a broader surgical recovery plan to reduce the surgical backlog resulting from the pandemic, Alberta's CSFs are expected to increase the number of publicly-funded surgeries available by more than 40,000 additional surgeries. They will offer cataract surgeries, plastic, gynecological, orthopedic, urological, oral maxillofacial, dental, and general surgeries.

How much of surgical services are already contracted?

We already collaborate with partners to perform a number of publicly-funded surgical procedures at our CSFs. In 2020, out of 290,000 surgeries performed annually for Albertans, CSFs provided 15 per cent, or 44,000 of these surgeries.

How many CSFs operate in Alberta?

There are about 79 CSFs in Alberta.

- 43 CSFs offer insured/publicly-funded surgeries.
- 36 CSFs offer non-insured surgeries, such as cosmetic surgery.

CSFs are required to meet all safety standards to be accredited by the CPSA to perform both insured and non-insured surgical services in Alberta.

These facilities are required to comply with the Chief Medical Officer of Health directed guidelines and if they have an outbreak, patient and staff safety will be prioritized.

Why is the first RFP for ophthalmology surgeries only?

Cataract and ophthalmology surgeries have long wait lists with many Albertans waiting longer than experts determine is clinically appropriate. Many providers already have space and can ramp up surgical activity in a timely manner.

How many more ophthalmology surgeries will CSFs be able to offer under this RFP?

Volumes within existing contracts have been increased for this year. The RFPs will continue to build further capacity by the end of this fiscal year and continuing for the next number of years.

Where are these facilities going to be contracted?

These facilities will be contracted in Edmonton and Calgary.

AHS is focused on increasing and improving Albertans access to all surgeries across the province, starting with those waiting longest first. While we are expanding procedures in Edmonton and Calgary, the ASI will provide opportunities to expand surgeries in all zones in time.

As we continue to implement strategies with the ASI, other specialties and zones will be included. We will continue to share information as it is available.

Will this impact any AHS sites like the Royal Alexandra Hospital Eye Institute? Will surgeons have to move to other facilities?

As less complex surgeries are moved out of hospitals and performed in CSFs in the community, hospitals will have more capacity to provide more surgeries, and more complex surgeries. This RFP will support an increase in surgical access and increased options for surgeries to be provided in community settings.

In the next few years, AHS will continue to perform ophthalmology surgeries at the Royal Alexandra Hospital in addition to in the community setting to aid in overall waitlist reduction targets.

AHS is committed to a healthcare system that leverages research, information and innovation to achieve excellence. The University of Alberta's (U of A) Department of Ophthalmology is housed at the Royal Alexandra Hospital, and funded by the U of A, where staff conduct research and provide teaching for ophthalmological education. Additionally, currently, the four operating rooms at the RAH are funded, managed and staff by AHS. These ophthalmological procedures, research and educational opportunities are important for the care of Albertans, and AHS is dedicated to working with the U of A and the RAH Eye Institute to continue to ensure the best, high-quality care is provided for Albertans, whether that is in an AHS facility, or in the community.

In Calgary Zone, over 80 per cent of all non-urgent cataract surgeries are done in the community. This model allows for increased use of AHS operating rooms for more acute surgical cases. Shifting to this model in the Edmonton Zone will support increased surgical capacity in the zone at AHS facilities and increase access.

Some healthcare workers from AHS will be working in CSFs and similar staff screening protocols will be similar across all AHS and non-AHS sites. AHS monitors the capacity of its health workforce on an ongoing basis. All proponents must provide details on their human resource plans that will help assess any potential impacts on the health workforce. The release of CSF RFPs are being staggered by surgical service type to allow for a measured implementation to assess impacts on workforce, wait times, and service access.

How are unions being informed about the RFP process?

We have dedicated staff and partners working with surgeons as part of the surgical team. We respect and appreciate that the teams are concerned about the impact these changes will have on their roles, and on the many partners and patients they work with every day.

If staff are required to be reallocated to support the increase in surgical activities, unions and staff will be engaged and notified as per AHS policies and practices.

What about other regional sites outside of Calgary and Edmonton?

This RFP is the first of a number of strategies to expand surgical services in Alberta. Currently, regional sites represent a smaller number of surgeries, with shorter wait times than in Calgary

and Edmonton. There will be additional opportunities for regional sites in 2021/2022 as part of the surgery mitigation plan, and the ASI.

Are there enough surgical staff and support staff available to increase surgeries in the province?

AHS has experienced ongoing challenges for recruiting anesthesiologists across the province, and is dedicated to ensuring these roles are available as we increase surgeries in Alberta. Although we are experiencing these challenges, recruiting anesthesiologist physicians is difficult across North America, particularly in areas outside of main urban centres.

AHS is aware of these issues, and we have a dedicated team in place focused on implementing solutions to support recruitment efforts for anesthesiology. The following solutions are underway:

- Aggressively pursuing both Canadian and internationally-trained physicians;
- Closely reviewing the local workforce in areas of need, providing incentives for full-time activity and reviewing retirement and succession plans with local medical leaders and anesthesiologists;
- Reassessing current locum experience for recruitment opportunities, and easing administrative burdens;
- Increasing collaboration between Zone clinical departments, and exploring rotation models from urban zones;
- Working with anesthesiologists to support flexible roles and scope of practice within AHS, if this increases availability;
- Exploring alternate models for anesthesia care;
- Enhancing recruitment efforts through enhanced marketing efforts;
- Consulting with post-graduate medical education (PGME) programs to enable work experience in non-urban facilities, increase the number of training positions, and exploring options for funding sponsored positions in PGME for anesthesiology; and
- Exploring options to improve the international sponsorship program.

AHS' goal is always to keep sites operating as normal, and to ensure that all patients receive safe care. AHS values the work our anesthesiologists do every day to bring care to patients across the province and we remain committed to supporting recruitment efforts to support their work.