



As a Nanton-area homemaker, Laura works tirelessly to improve rural healthcare accessibility.

Lived experience and a wish to improve healthcare brought Laura Smith to the Prairie Mountain Health Advisory Council.

“As a homemaker, my family is of the utmost importance to me. Ensuring their well-being and happiness is paramount,” she says. “I think this is a universal sentiment. My passion and concern with regards to the well-being of others is what drives my work with Council.

“I’m living and raising my four children in the Nanton region. The issues we struggle with as a family and as individuals are not isolated to us. We all have various healthcare struggles inside our own homes and even in our communities at large.

“If I want to see changes in terms of better healthcare access and supports for my community and other families, I need to be willing to help facilitate that.”

Laura shares how she’s personally faced healthcare accessibility issues.

“The accessibility issue hit home when I suffered an ectopic pregnancy in 2009 — and had to travel three hours to the nearest hospital equipped with operating facilities and an anesthesiologist.”

She’s grateful for the ongoing, collaborative nature of Health Advisory Councils, which means there’s always room for growth and improvement.

“I’d like more people to know that these Councils exist — and that we’re here to listen to the voices of all community members — as we endeavor to keep doing what is right or to make the changes that will improve people’s healthcare experiences.”

Two important issues focused Laura’s desire to serve on Council.

“Firstly, I’ve spent the past two decades living in small, rural communities that have faced numerous healthcare issues — from rolling ER closures, ongoing physician recruitment and retention struggles, patients facing travel times of two to five hours to access specialists, to families having to send their children 600-1,200 km away to pediatric hospitals for treatment. The healthcare accessibility issues faced by residents of small, rural communities are often incomprehensible to those that live in major urban centres. It’s so important for the voices of these communities to be heard.

“Secondly, we moved to Alberta (from B.C.) the year prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, and when it hit, we were already dealing with significant teen mental health issues that suddenly went from bad to worse. Add in an unfamiliar healthcare system, a rural location, and a world shut down — and we were floundering as a family.

“When the call for volunteers was presented, I jumped at the opportunity, as I figured there were likely other families in similar situations of not knowing where to turn for assistance. I saw the importance of being in a position to provide knowledge and information to my community and being able to bring back their concerns and ideas.” When Laura wants to have some fun, she turns to crafts.

“I’m a fibre-arts enthusiast. I enjoy spending time knitting, rug-hooking and (badly) sewing. I’m lucky enough to live in a community with an abundance of craft groups to inspire and encourage me.”

For more information on the Prairie Mountain Health Advisory Council, visit ahs.ca/advisorycouncils, or email prairiemountain@ahs.ca.



Laura enjoyed a brief career as a marine farm technician on a floating smolt fish farm in the Broughton Archipelago of B.C. before becoming a devoted homemaker.