



## Message from Dr. Verna Yiu & Dr. Laura McDougall

*AHS Update: Pressures on ICU continue to intensify  
as number of active cases pushes past 20,000*

*Please print and share with your teams as needed*

**Dear staff, physicians and volunteers,**

### **Today's Update**

- **Opening Message from Verna**
- **COVID-19 Cases in Alberta**
- **Government Appoints New Health Minister**
- **COVID-19 Immunization Update**
- **Protective Effects of COVID-19 Immunization**
- **Remember to Submit your Proof of COVID-19 Immunization**
- **COVID-19 Testing for Healthcare Workers**
- **Verna's Weekly Video Message — Equitable Access to Care**
- **PPE Question of the Week — What Safety Measures Should We Follow to Protect Ourselves in this Fourth Wave?**
- **Decal Package to Address PPE Fatigue**
- **Celebrating Environmental Public Health Week**
- **Get the Help You Need**
- **Sharing the Love**
- **Gratitude from Albertans**
- **Wrapping Up — Living our Values in Difficult Times**

**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.**

Our hospitals – and in particular, our intensive care units – continue to experience unprecedented patient demand. AHS continues to do all it can to ensure we have enough ICU capacity to meet patient needs, including opening additional spaces and redeploying staff.

As of today (Sept. 24), we have 368 ICU beds open in Alberta, including 195 additional spaces (a 113 per cent increase over our baseline of 173).

Critical care triage has not been implemented, and our hope is that we will not have to implement it. It will only be implemented if all efforts to increase ICU capacity are exhausted – that has not happened yet. AHS has opened 42 additional ICU surge spaces in the past seven days, including 20 in the past 24 hours. Any patient who requires mechanical ventilation is currently able to receive it.

There are currently 304 patients in ICU, the vast majority of whom are COVID positive.

Provincially, ICU capacity (including additional surge beds) is currently at 83 per cent. Without the additional surge spaces, provincial ICU capacity would be 177 per cent.

The number of patients in ICU has increased by 18 per cent in the past seven days.

It's tragic we are only able to keep pace with those sorts of numbers because in part, some of our ICU patients have passed away. This reality has a deep and lasting impact on our ICU teams.

With that in mind, I (Verna) should also note that over a two-day period, our teams have managed to move 18 patients out of ICU. That means those patients no longer need that critical level of care, and are hopefully on the long road to recovery.

We are facing a fragile balance. On some days we are seeing more ICU patients being admitted than new ICU beds being created. We are transferring more patients out of zones to other zones where there is additional critical care capacity. And every day our teams are focused on adding more critical care capacity.

I'd like to thank you all for your tireless efforts, and for providing the very best care to patients even though you are frustrated and exhausted. Words aren't enough to sum up how proud I am of all of you.

## COVID-19 Status

---

As mentioned in the above item, capacity pressures continued to be intense in AHS hospitals across the province this past week, with the number of active cases in Alberta exceeding 20,000 for the first time since last May.

There are currently 20,040 active cases of COVID-19 in Alberta, a 4.4 per cent increase compared to Sept. 17 when there were 19,201 active cases.

For the seven-day period ending Sept. 22, there was an average of 1,605 new daily cases of COVID-19, compared to 1,566 for the previous week (Sept. 9-15), a 2.5 per cent increase. New case numbers varied significantly from zone to zone. Calgary Zone reported a 19.6 per cent decrease in new cases compared to last week, whereas South Zone reported a 40.3 per cent increase. Edmonton Zone reported a 7.9 per cent decrease, although it had the highest total number of new cases, with 2,859.

The increase in new and active cases is reflected in our hospitalization numbers. There are currently 1,061 individuals with COVID-19 in hospital, compared to 911 on Sept. 17, an increase of 16.5 per cent.

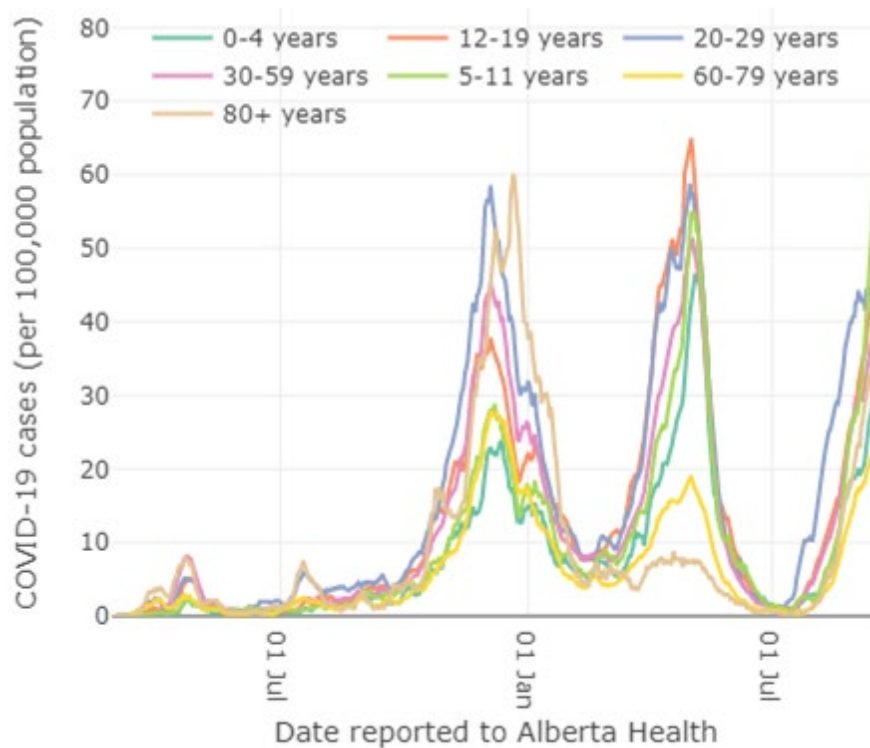
### **Cases by age group**

As of Sept. 19, children ages five to 11 — who are currently ineligible to receive a COVID-19 vaccine — had the highest seven-day rolling average of new daily COVID-19 cases, with 62.9 cases per 100,000 children. Albertans ages 12 to 19 had the second-highest rate with 42.3 cases per 100,000 people. Clearly, the Delta variant is much more virulent than previous variants of concern, and it is impacting younger people at higher rates.

To make it easier for eligible children and teenagers to get immunized, we are supporting schools to provide immunizations at temporary in-school clinics. This is open to eligible students in Grades 7 to 12, as well as teachers and staff.

Clinics are running during and after school hours at schools across the province, and we're strongly advising parents to take advantage of this program. More than 1,500 eligible students have already been immunized at these school clinics.

Trends in COVID-19 cases by age group can be seen in the figure below.



### Variants of concern

With the increase in cases of COVID-19, the lab has moved back to targeted screening of positive samples for strain-typing. From Sept. 14 to Sept. 20, an average of 43 per cent of positive samples were strain-typed. Of those, the rolling average was 99.5 per cent Delta variant. Strain-typing takes several days and these numbers may change as lab data becomes available.

### Other notable COVID-19-related information

- As of Sept. 22, a total of 286,706 cases of COVID-19 have been detected in Alberta and a total of 12,177 individuals have been hospitalized, which amounts to 4.2 individuals for every 100 cases. In all, 263,915 Albertans have recovered from COVID-19.
- As of Sept. 22, 2,611 individuals have passed away from COVID-19, including 106 deaths over a seven-day period. We extend our deep condolences to the families of these individuals, and to all who have lost loved ones from any cause during this time. We have seen the number of deaths due to COVID-19 increase significantly again during this fourth wave, a sad reminder that this virus can be deadly, particularly for those who are not immunized. Every day we see the numbers; and as you all know well, these are people. They are spouses and partners, grandparents, uncles and aunts, and sons and daughters. They are people's best friends and loved ones.
- From Sept. 16 to Sept. 22, 109,831 COVID-19 tests were completed, an average of 15,690 tests per day. During this period, the daily positivity ranged from 9.1 per cent to 11.35 per cent. As of Sept. 22, a total of 5.4 million tests have been conducted and 2.4 million individuals have 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 Sept. 13 to Sept. 19, the provincewide R value was 1.04 and the previously reported value was 1.12. The R value for Edmonton and Calgary was 0.97 and 0.94, respectively, while the rest of the province had an R value of 1.15.

- Alberta Health has not resumed school reporting.

## Things You Need to Know

---

### **Government Appoints New Health Minister**

This past Tuesday (Sept. 21), the Government of Alberta appointed Jason Copping the new Minister of Health, replacing Tyler Shandro. Copping was previously Minister of Labour and Immigration. AHS looks forward to working with Minister Copping as the province responds to the fourth wave of the pandemic and severe capacity pressures on the health system.

### **COVID-19 Immunization Update**

#### *Expansion of criteria for third doses*

This week, the Government of Alberta expanded eligibility for an additional dose of COVID-19 vaccine to more immunocompromised Albertans to align with [recent recommendations made by the National Advisory Committee on Immunization](#).

Individuals with advanced HIV infection and additional patients receiving medications that impact their immune systems are among those now able to get an additional dose of COVID-19 vaccine. A full list of immunocompromising conditions that qualify for an additional dose at least eight weeks after a second dose are available on the [Alberta Health website](#).

Third doses of COVID-19 vaccine are also available for seniors living in congregate care. These individuals are at the highest risk of severe outcomes and potential spread within congregate living sites.

Additional mRNA doses are also available to Albertans who are travelling to a jurisdiction that does not accept visitors who have been vaccinated with Covishield/AstraZeneca or mixed doses.

Eligible Albertans can book appointments online at either an AHS clinic or pharmacy through the online booking system at [alberta.ca/vaccine](https://alberta.ca/vaccine). Albertans can also book an appointment by calling Health Link at 811.

### *Protecting children under 12 not yet eligible for COVID-19 immunization*

At this point in time, there are no COVID-19 vaccines approved by Health Canada for use in children under 12. Until vaccines are approved, the best way for parents and guardians to protect their children is to get immunized themselves and ensure family members ages 12 and up are immunized as well.

As of Sept. 21, the uptake of COVID-19 vaccine among the 12-to-29 age group continues to fall behind that of all eligible Albertans. Only 73 per cent of those in this age group have received one dose and 61 per cent are fully immunized. This is compared to rates among all eligible Albertans; 82 per cent of whom have received one dose and 73 per cent of whom are fully immunized.

With lower rates of immunization, adolescents and young adults have a higher chance of getting the virus, including variant strains, and transmitting it to those who are not immunized.

If you haven't already, please get immunized. Albertans ages 18 and up may be eligible to receive a [\\$100 debit card](#) if they receive their first or second dose before Oct. 14. Please encourage loved ones and those you know who are eligible to get the vaccine to do so as soon as possible.

Together, we are building a protective shield around those for whom the vaccine is not yet available, and for those with health conditions that may make them vulnerable. We must all do our part to protect each other.

### *Co-administration of COVID-19 and influenza vaccines*

With the annual influenza immunization program launching in mid-October, AHS is reminding Albertans it is safe and recommended to receive both the COVID-19 vaccine and the influenza vaccine this year.

COVID-19 vaccines were previously recommended to be administered alone, with a minimum interval of 14 days before or after administration of any other vaccines. This was recommended out of an abundance of caution when the COVID-19 vaccines were new.

Substantial data has now been collected, and COVID-19 vaccines can now be administered at the same time as, or any time before or after, other inactivated (non-live) vaccines. This is safe and recommended for all populations, including children and youth 12 and older and those who are pregnant, trying to get pregnant or who have recently delivered.

Live vaccines need to be spaced 14 days, before or after, the administration of a COVID-19 vaccine.

### *COVID-19 immunization during pregnancy*

AHS continues to strongly urge those who are pregnant, trying to become pregnant, or have recently delivered to get both doses of the COVID-19 vaccine as soon as possible.

COVID-19, particularly the Delta variant, is highly infectious and pregnant individuals are at a higher risk of getting severely ill from COVID-19.

The COVID-19 vaccine is safe and effective for pregnant individuals and their babies, with mRNA vaccines being the safest type of COVID-19 vaccine to get during pregnancy. The National Advisory Committee on Immunization and the Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists of Canada recommend those who are pregnant get a complete series of vaccine. Pregnant individuals can get the vaccine at any time (any trimester) during pregnancy.

Research also shows the COVID-19 vaccine does not impact fertility and does not increase the risk of miscarriage.

We would like to remind you AHS has several resources available (new and recently updated) to support your conversations with patients and clients who are pregnant, trying to become pregnant, or who have recently delivered:

- **Web:** [ahs.ca/vaccinepregnancy](https://ahs.ca/vaccinepregnancy)
- **Updated:** [COVID-19 Immunization in Pregnancy](#)
- **Updated:** [COVID-19 and Pregnancy, Birth, and Postpartum and Breastfeeding: Information for Expectant and New Parents Public Health](#)
- [Alberta COVID-19 Immunization in Pregnancy Factsheet for Practitioners](#)
- **New Poster:** COVID-19 Vaccines & Pregnancy [8.5x11](#) | [11x17](#)
- **New Videos:** [Dr. Sue Chandra on Why COVID-19 Vaccine is Safe During Pregnancy & Dr. Erin Bader on How the COVID-19 Vaccine Protects Mother and Baby](#)

### **Protective Effects of COVID-19 Immunization**

Vaccines remain one of our most powerful tools in the fight against COVID-19. They are safe, effective and they save lives. As Alberta's Chief Medical Officer of Health Dr. Deena Hinshaw explained [earlier this week](#):

- Albertans who have not been fully immunized are about 15 times more likely than those with vaccine protection to end up in the hospital from COVID-19.
- They are about 40 times more likely to be admitted to the ICU.
- About 77 per cent of Albertans in hospital with COVID-19 are not fully immunized and 92 per cent of those in the ICU have not had two doses of the COVID-19 vaccine.

There is a lot of misinformation out there about COVID-19 vaccines. Different people have different feelings and concerns about COVID-19 immunization and that's OK. But we should all have the same information and support each other to learn more.

The data below compiled by [Alberta Health](#) on vaccine outcomes shows that immunization will protect most people from getting sick, having to go to the hospital or dying if they get infected with COVID-19.

We hope this data can help inform and support your conversations with patients, clients, family members, friends, loved ones and networks, about the importance and effectiveness of COVID-19 immunization.

*COVID-19 hospitalization, count and rate (per 100,000 population) in the past 120 days in Alberta by vaccine status.*

Age group	Fully vaccinated & hospitalized (n)	Fully vaccinated & hospitalized (rate per 100K)	Partially vaccinated & hospitalized (n)	Partially vaccinated & hospitalized (rate per 100K)	Unvaccinated & hospitalized (n)	Unvaccinated & hospitalized (rate per 100K)
Under 12 years	0	0.00	0	0.00	73	11.05
12-29 years	11	1.85	13	2.98	298	34.15
30-39 years	21	4.71	13	21.68	410	55.32
40-49 years	27	5.31	32	6.95	408	294.27
50-59 years	38	9.06	52	69.73	563	558.76
60-69 years	80	19.83	53	263.45	570	1120.23
70-79 years	139	59.29	56	747.46	383	2048.57
80+ years	216	14.35	40	987.17	228	849.52

*COVID-19 ICU admission, count and rate (per 100,000 population) in the past 120 days in Alberta by vaccine status.*

Age group	Fully vaccinated & admitted in ICU (n)	Fully vaccinated & admitted in ICU (rate per 100K)	Partially vaccinated & admitted in ICU (n)	Partially vaccinated & admitted in ICU (rate per 100K)	Unvaccinated & admitted in ICU (n)	Unvaccinated & admitted in ICU (rate per 100K)
Under 12 years	0	0.00	0	0.00	14	2.12
12-29 years	1	0.17	0	0.00	50	5.80
30-39 years	0	0.00	0	0.00	86	10.97
40-49 years	8	1.87	8	9.24	105	75.73
50-59 years	7	1.67	13	42.43	182	180.63
60-69 years	14	3.47	14	68.59	197	387.17
70-79 years	14	5.97	10	133.48	102	545.57
80+ years	6	4.84	1	24.68	13	105.46

*COVID-19 deaths, count and rate (per 100,000 population) in the past 120 days in Alberta by vaccine status.*



Age group	Fully vaccinated & died (n)	Fully vaccinated & died (rate per 100K)	Partially vaccinated & died (n)	Partially vaccinated & died (rate per 100K)	Unvaccinated & died (n)	Unvaccinated & died (rate per 100K)
Under 12 years	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
12-29 years	0	0.00	0	0.00	4	1.26
30-39 years	0	0.00	0	0.00	5	2.38
40-49 years	3	0.70	1	2.40	12	8.65
50-59 years	4	0.95	3	9.79	34	33.74
60-69 years	14	3.47	7	34.79	62	121.85
70-79 years	21	8.96	7	93.43	72	385.11
80+ years	70	56.50	7	172.75	77	624.62

### Remember to Submit your Proof of COVID-19 Immunization

[AHS' Immunization of Workers for COVID-19 Immunization Policy](#) requires all employees, medical and midwifery staff, students, volunteers and contracted healthcare providers to be fully immunized for COVID-19 by Oct. 31, 2021. This will help protect our vital front-line healthcare teams who continue to provide excellent care to anyone who needs it and maintain a safe environment for all.

Please submit your proof of immunization by using the [Got My COVID-19 Immunization Form](#) as soon as possible and no later than Oct. 16, 2021. Thank you to the more than 49,000 individuals who have already done so. Your ongoing support and dedication are greatly appreciated.

[Submit proof of immunization now](#)

[Frequently asked questions](#) on the policy and additional supports and resources can be found on [Insite](#). For more information, contact [AHSVaccineTaskForce@ahs.ca](mailto:AHSVaccineTaskForce@ahs.ca).

### COVID-19 Testing for Healthcare Workers

We continue to update the testing data for healthcare workers. These statistics provide the total number of AHS and Alberta Precision Laboratories (APL) employees and physicians tested, including a breakdown of the number of positive tests and those who have been confirmed to have been exposed in the workplace.

As of Sept. 21:

- 82,585 employees (AHS and APL combined) have been tested for COVID-19 and, of those tested, 7,375 (or 8.9 per cent) have tested positive.
- Of the 5,503 employees who have tested positive and whose source of infection has been determined, 625 (or 11.4 per cent) acquired their infection through a workplace exposure. An additional 1,872 employees who have tested positive are still under investigation as to the source of infection.

5,839 physicians (AHS and APL combined) have been tested for COVID-19 and, of those tested, 307 (or 5.3 per cent) have tested positive.

- Of the 232 physicians who have tested positive and whose source of infection has been determined, 21 (or 9.1 per cent) acquired their infection through a workplace exposure. An additional 75 physicians who have tested positive are still under investigation as to the source of infection.

For more information, see the AHS Healthcare Worker COVID-19 Testing [infographic](#).

### **Verna's Weekly Video Message — Equitable Access to Care**

Immunization is one of the most effective ways to protect our health and we strongly encourage everyone to get the vaccine once they are eligible to receive it.

At the same time, we recognize different people will have different feelings and concerns about COVID-19 immunization. And that's OK.

Unfortunately, one of the narratives out there in the public realm is to shame those who are not immunized. Some even suggest we go as far as withholding care to the unvaccinated.

I (Verna) want to be clear: this is a view AHS does not share. While we will continue to strongly advocate for all individuals to become vaccinated, vaccine status will never impact access to care.

Our role is to provide care and help break down any barriers that might exist for people who are open to making a different choice.

[Joining me to discuss this topic](#) are:

- Sean Chilton, Vice President, People, Health Professions and Information Technology.
- Dr. Mark Joffe, Vice President and Medical Director, Cancer Care Alberta, Clinical Support Services and Provincial Clinical Excellence.
- Dr. Cheryl Mack, Chair, Clinical Ethics Committee, Stollery Children's Hospital, Mazankowski Alberta Heart Institute, WCM Health Sciences Centre, and Edmonton Kaye Clinic.
- Duncan Steele, Organizational Ethicist, Clinical Ethics Services.



### **PPE Question of the Week — What Safety Measures Should We Follow to Protect Ourselves in this Fourth Wave?**

In the latest [PPE Question of the Week video](#), Kimberly Nickoriuk — Director, Policy, Practice, Access and Case Manager for Provincial Seniors Health and Continuing Care — explains why it’s critically important we all continue to follow a few basic PPE safety measures during this fourth wave of COVID-19.



You can see more videos in the PPE Question of the Week series on our [PPE webpage](#).

### **Decal Package To Address PPE Fatigue**

One of our top priorities continues to be the safety of our front-line workers. We know many are showing signs of PPE fatigue. Common signs of PPE fatigue are

improperly worn face masks and face shields. This puts patients, staff, physicians and others in the community at a higher risk of exposure.

The PPE Task Force has created a signage campaign to encourage improved PPE compliance. You can order the signage package for your site — at no cost.

The package has seven vinyl floor decals (below), each one square foot in size. The decals are easily installed, easily removed and meet AHS standards for infection prevention and control, as well as workplace safety.

To order your signage, visit the [DATA Communications Management website](#) and enter the username **AHSsigns** and password **signs2019**. Click on Catalogue and scroll down on the left side of the page to find 'PPE Make Your First Step.' (order # 1203694).

Thank you for taking this safety step with us, as we work together to ensure the health and well-being of our patients, families and one another.

### **Celebrating Environmental Public Health Week**

More than 18 months into the COVID-19 pandemic, the Safe Healthy Environments team continues to be the first point of contact for many Albertans. To date, the team has addressed more than 95,000 complaints and questions.

From responding to complaint service requests, to outbreak response and congregate living inspection collaborations; from producing high-quality rapid reviews to creatively adapting administrative responses, the team has exceeded all expectations.

As we come to the end of Environmental Public Health Week (Sept. 20-26), we would like to recognize your incredible work on the front lines of the pandemic response, which has been critical to slowing the spread of COVID-19.

We would like all team members to reflect on, and take pride in, the difference you make in the lives of Albertans. Each day, the spread of COVID-19 and other diseases are prevented because of your diligence and dedication. Thank you for keeping our communities healthy and safe, and for protecting all Albertans.

We'd also like to [share a video](#) (see below) about the work of the SHE team.



## Be Well - Be Kind

---

### **Get the Help You Need**

As we continue to deal with the challenges related to COVID-19, it's important to look after yourself. You can take simple steps like [checking in with yourself](#) at the end of the day, [getting some rest](#) or [having a conversation](#) about mental health. If you notice someone is struggling, learn how you can [offer your support](#).

See the [Resilience, Wellness and Mental Health Resource Guide](#) for a comprehensive list of health and wellness supports and the [COVID-19 EFAP Support Menu](#) for a quick reference on resources for stress and burnout, immediate support and self-care. If you need immediate support, contact the EFAP intake line at 1-877-273-3134 available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Learn more about other health and wellness supports available on [Insite](#). For questions or feedback, contact [wellness@ahs.ca](mailto:wellness@ahs.ca).

### **Sharing the Love**

When staff and physicians at the Edson Healthcare Centre finished their shifts yesterday (Sept. 23), they found every vehicle in their parking lot had anonymous notes of gratitude and flowers left on the windshields. It brightened the day of our healthcare heroes – thank you!



### **Gratitude from Albertans**

Everything you and your colleagues do every day to provide safe quality care to all Albertans is being noticed. Messages of gratitude keep coming in from across the province and beyond during the COVID-19 pandemic. We want to share some recent messages of gratitude with you — and you can see others on our [Sharing the Love webpage](#).

*I am writing this note to you and your staff to let you know how much my family, colleagues, friends and I value all the good work you do in these difficult times. Your courage, perseverance and kindness are extremely appreciated, and we are grateful to you all for your compassion, dedication and commitment to humanity. Your entire staff are in our thoughts and hearts.*

— Dani J

*A heartfelt thank you to all healthcare workers in this province and this country who selflessly show up to work every day, knowing the risks, remain professional, compassionate and dedicated to helping the sick and injured. You continue to show strength and resolve through a very difficult and*

*demanding time.*

— Anonymous

*I am blessed to have good health but I am concerned about the numbers. I just want to say that I support you. I am worried about what's going on with COVID-19. I am glad we will have a provincewide mask mandate. I hope more Albertans over 12 and over will get vaccinated. In the meantime, I am so grateful to AHS.*

— Anonymous

### **Wrapping Up — Living our Values in Difficult Times**

Five years ago, many of you participated in the process that led to the development of AHS' organizational values: Compassion, Accountability, Respect, Excellence and Safety; in short, AHS CARES. These values are meant to inspire, empower and guide how we work together with patients, clients, families and each other.

At a time like this, it's more important than ever to lean on our values. We are going through the most difficult time in our organization's history. It doesn't help that some people are flouting public health measures and putting additional, unnecessary strain on you and your teams. May we all do our best to show compassion and respect to everyone; be accountable to one another; always strive for excellence and safety in the face of intense pressure on the health system. Ultimately, may we always care — for patients and families, and for each other. By doing so, we will draw strength from the best parts of who we are and use our collective humanity to guide our province through this dark time. Thank you for everything you do.

With enduring gratitude and appreciation,

#### **Dr. Verna Yiu**

AHS President & CEO

#### **Dr. Laura McDougall**

Senior Medical Officer of Health



Healthy Albertans.  
Healthy Communities.  
**Together.**

