



Message from Dr. Verna Yiu & Dr. Laura McDougall

*AHS Update: Numbers mostly trend in right direction,
deadline to submit proof of immunization
approaches*

Please print and share with your teams as needed

Dear staff, physicians and volunteers,

Today's Update

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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.



Deadline: You Must Submit Your COVID-19 Immunization Status by **October 16**

Supports When You Need Them

How to Access Support for Managing Stress and Burnout

We are all feeling the impact of responding to another wave of the pandemic and appreciate you are likely feeling increased stress or possibly experiencing burnout. [Stress Solutions](#) is an over-the-phone program that focuses on stress management techniques and exercises. You'll learn how to reduce tension, stay connected to keep yourself healthy and energized, manage your thinking and feelings to influence your mood and behaviour, and manage your time to stay organized and participate in activities that bring value to your life.

To access this service, contact the [Employee & Family Assistance Program](#) (EFAP) intake line at 1-877-273-3134. You will be asked a few questions to make sure you receive the customized support that is most helpful. A stress specialist will contact you and provide you with coaching, support and materials to help your specific situation, and stay in touch to ensure you have the supports needed to reduce stress.

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

There are many ways we can support you no matter what your situation – see the [Resilience, Wellness and Mental Health Resource Guide](#) for a comprehensive list of

health and wellness supports. Questions? Contact wellness@ahs.ca.

COVID-19 Status

ICU Capacity Update

As of around noon today (Oct. 8), we have 374 ICU beds open in Alberta, including 201 additional spaces (a 116 per cent increase over our baseline of 173). This is unchanged from last week.

On a daily and even hourly basis, we are monitoring our ICU numbers and hospital admissions. Because of the incredible efforts of teams across the province, we have not needed to implement the critical care triage protocol. Any patient who requires mechanical ventilation is currently able to receive it. We are doing all we can to avoid implementing the triage in our ICUs.

The Executive Leadership Team has decided not to activate pediatric triage should AHS reach the point of activating the critical care triage protocol. This is a shift in our approach that we wanted to update for all physicians and staff.

Again, triage will only be implemented if all efforts to increase ICU capacity are exhausted – and that has not happened yet.

As of midday today, there were 290 patients in ICU, 250 of whom were COVID-19 positive. Nearly 90 per cent of all COVID-19-positive patients in our ICUs are either unvaccinated or partially vaccinated (with only the first of the two-dose series administered).

Provincially, ICU capacity (including additional surge beds) is currently at 78 per cent. Without the additional surge spaces, provincial ICU capacity would be 168 per cent.

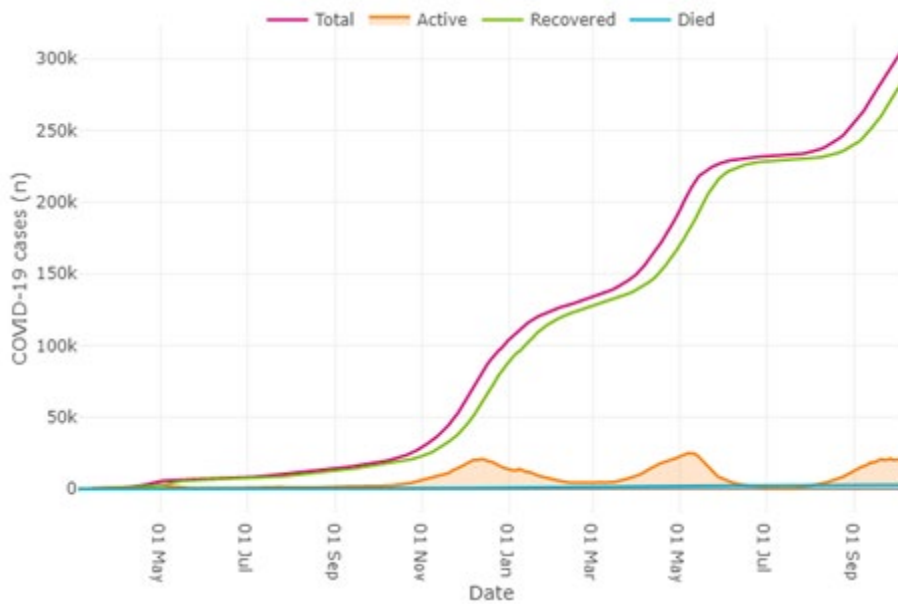
The number of patients in ICU has decreased by 8.2 per cent compared to one week ago. There would be more people in our ICUs if not for the sobering reality that many patients have passed away. Over the past seven days, 97 Albertans with COVID-19 have died. We extend our condolences to the families of these individuals, and to all who have lost loved ones from any cause during this time.

New and Active Cases

There are currently 17,839 active cases of COVID-19 in Alberta, an 11.7 per cent decrease compared to Oct. 1 when there were 20,215 active cases.

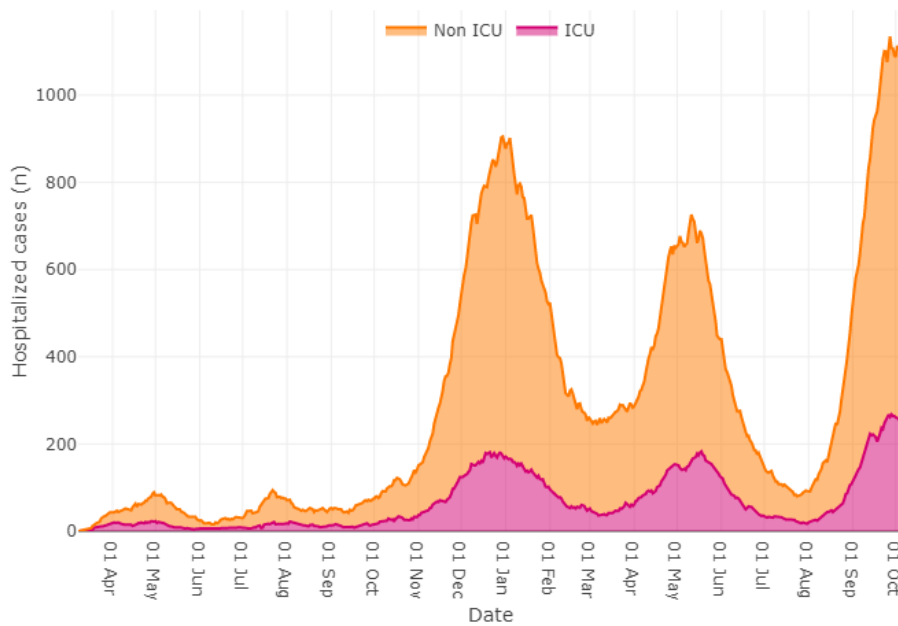
For the seven-day period ending Oct. 6, there was an average of 1,275 new daily cases of COVID-19, compared to 1,646 for the previous week (Sept. 23-29), a 22.5 per cent decrease. This week, all zones reported decreases in the number of new cases per day, ranging from a 15.3 per cent decrease in the Calgary Zone to a 30.8

per cent decrease in the Edmonton Zone. Over the past week, the Calgary Zone reported the highest total number of new cases with 2,244, compared to 2,651 new cases the previous week, a 15.3 per cent decrease..



Hospitalizations

The number of individuals in non-ICU hospital beds with COVID-19 remained stable over the past week: 846 individuals on Oct. 6 compared to 843 on Sept. 29.

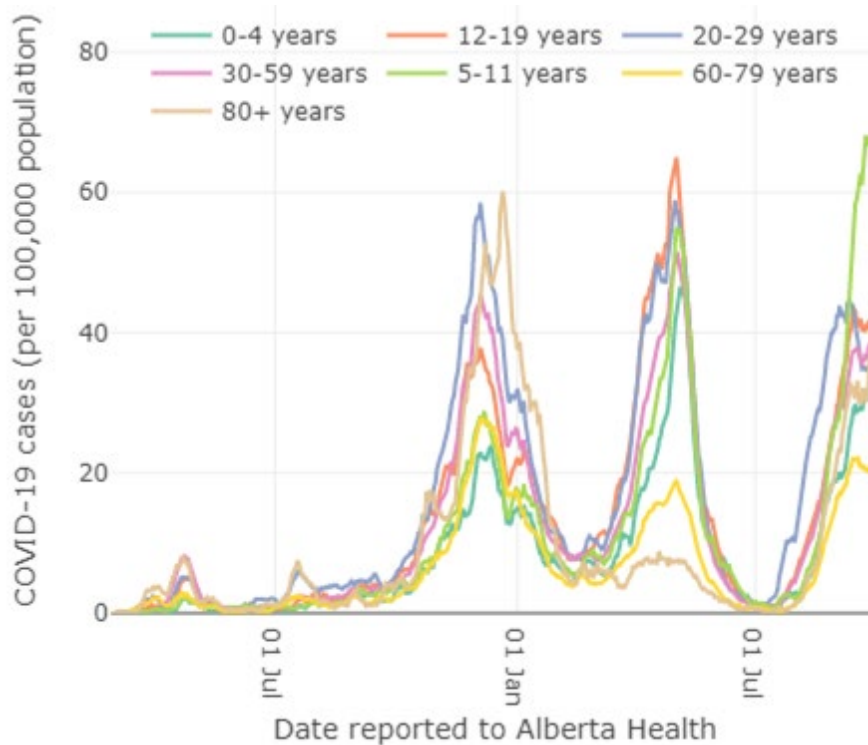


Cases by age group

As of Oct. 3, 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 52 cases per 100,000 children. Albertans ages 12 to 19 had the second-highest rate with 30.3 cases per 100,000 people.

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



Variants of Concern

The lab is still utilizing targeted screening of positive samples for strain-typing. From Sept. 28 to Oct. 4, the average proportion of positive samples that were strain-typed was 45 per cent. Of those strain-typed, the rolling average was 99.9 per cent Delta variant. Strain-typing takes a number of days and these numbers may change as lab data becomes available.

Other notable COVID-19-related information:

- As of Oct. 6, a total of 307,019 cases of COVID-19 have been detected in Alberta and a total of 13,286 individuals have been hospitalized, which amounts to 4.3 individuals for every 100 cases. In all, 285,794 Albertans have recovered from COVID-19.
- From Sept. 30 to Oct. 6, 94,178 COVID-19 tests were completed, an average of 13,454 tests per day. During this period, the daily positivity ranged from 8.1 per cent to 11.2 per cent. As of Oct. 6, a total of 5.6 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. 27 to Oct. 3, the provincewide R value was 0.92 and the previously reported value was 1.04.

Things You Need to Know

Now is the Time to Submit your Proof of Immunization for COVID-19

All employees, medical and midwifery staff, students, volunteers and contracted healthcare providers must be fully immunized by Oct. 31, 2021, to comply with the [Immunization of Workers for COVID-19 Policy](#). Workers must receive the final dose of their vaccine no later than Oct. 16, 2021, to be considered fully immunized by Oct. 31, 2021. It's essential to ensure the safety of our people, patients and communities. Healthcare workers have an [ethical and professional](#) responsibility to protect others. Immunization helps us meet this standard.

If you are fully immunized, please don't wait until the Oct. 16, 2021, deadline to submit your proof of immunization, as this information is needed for planning purposes. Leaders now have access to the new COVID-19 Immunization Manager Look Up Tool that shows their list of employees and confirmed record status. If your manager has informed you that your record hasn't been confirmed yet, but you have submitted a record, we ask for your patience. We are working hard to process and confirm records as quickly as possible.

See the [Got My COVID-19 Immunization Form](#) for instructions on how to submit your record today.

NOTE: If you submitted the form before the policy was announced on Sept. 14, you need to re-submit using the new form issued the day the policy came into effect.

Except where a [workplace accommodation](#) is approved, those employees who are not fully immunized by Oct. 31, 2021, will be placed on an unpaid leave of absence. Please see our [staff FAQ](#) for more information. Additional supports and resources can be found on [Insite](#). For more information, contact AHSVaccineTaskForce@ahs.ca.

New Sessions Added — Mandatory Vaccination: An Ethics Perspective

Due to growing demand, the Clinical Ethics Service is offering more live sessions for staff to learn about the ethics of mandatory vaccination.

The session sheds light on how healthcare workers have additional obligations, how there will be times when prevention of harm to others can justify curtailing individual liberties, and how those liberties should be curtailed as little as possible when trying to achieve public health goals.

Tues. Oct. 12	10 – 11 AM	Edmonton Zone Zoom Meeting (or call in by phone 1 587 328 1099 Meeting ID: 984 6758 4999, passcode: 879213)
Wed. Oct. 13	7 – 8 AM	All Zones Zoom Meeting (call in by phone 1 587 328 1099 Meeting ID: 979 8995 6422, passcode: 503864)
	11 AM – Noon	Calgary Zone Zoom Meeting (call in by phone 1 587 328 1099 Meeting ID: 954 8795 1036, passcode: 316905)
Thurs. Oct. 14	9 – 10 AM	South Zone Zoom Meeting (call in by phone 1 587 328 1099 Meeting ID: 915 4812 6999, passcode: 042489)
	5 – 6 PM	All Zones Zoom Meeting (call in by phone 1 587 328 1099 Meeting ID: 943 0572 8996, passcode: 890573)

If you can't make the sessions, a recording has been posted on the [AHS website](#) for all interested staff and physicians. The Clinical Ethics Service also authored a guide to help us [navigate ethical challenges in the COVID-19 pandemic](#). If you have questions, contact clinicaethics@ahs.ca.

No Change to Designated Support Person, Visitor Access for Thanksgiving

As we approach Thanksgiving weekend, many patients and families will want to connect in-person on- and off-site. However, given the current rate of COVID-19 transmission, the following applies:

- Off-site passes are not recommended for the Thanksgiving weekend unless essential to the patient's care plan. This includes day and overnight passes at any AHS acute care facility.
- If a pass is essential to support a patient's care plan, the care team must weigh the risks and benefits with the patient before the decision is made. Passes will not be considered strictly for the purposes of social visitation during Thanksgiving. Impacts include exposure to COVID-19 due to high rates of community transmission and the potential need to quarantine upon returning to the facility.
- Review our [Thanksgiving weekend FAQ](#) for more information. This FAQ is written to be shared with patients and families.

Please refer to our [guidance document](#) for more information on outdoor access and patient passes.

Canadian Armed Forces Nurses Land in Edmonton

This past Wednesday (Oct. 6), eight Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) critical care nursing officers and a CAF senior nursing officer arrived at the Royal Alexandra Hospital for an orientation session with AHS staff. By the afternoon, four of the military nurses were paired with a buddy for their first shift on the intensive care unit, with the remaining four providing immediate patient care yesterday (Oct. 7). The critical care nurses, deployed from Ontario and Nova Scotia, have been brought in to help alleviate pressure on a critical care unit at overcapacity due to COVID-19 patients.



Fort McMurray Prepares for Arrival of Newfoundland Healthcare Team

The Northern Lights Regional Health Centre has raised the Newfoundland and Labrador flag (see below) in anticipation for the arrival of a healthcare team from the Atlantic province. A team of seven healthcare workers — nurses, physicians and a nurse practitioner — is expected to arrive this weekend in Fort McMurray and will help with staffing pressures and increasing capacity at the hospital. Their arrival will enable the Northern Lights Regional Health Centre to increase ICU capacity from eight ICU beds and one overflow bed to 10 ICU beds and one overflow bed.



Changes to School Outbreak Reporting, Contact Notification

This past Tuesday (Oct. 5), the province implemented further measures to protect students, parents, teachers and staff during the fourth wave of the pandemic.

[Public reporting](#) of COVID-19 cases in schools resumed this week and will include the name of each school with at least two COVID-19 cases. An outbreak investigation will be completed by AHS when 10 or more COVID-19 cases, infectious while at school, are recorded within a 14-day period.

Starting Oct. 12, parents will be informed if their child may have been exposed to a COVID-19 case who was infectious while at school. On an interim basis, school authorities will determine close contacts for students in schools using criteria provided by AHS and will notify families of close contacts in a school setting only.

AHS will take over the lead on contact notification in schools within the next several weeks. Once AHS-led contact notification is in place, parents will be able to check an online map to view alerts and outbreaks at schools.

Students in kindergarten to Grade 6 will shift to learning at home if there are three or more students, teachers, or staff who were infectious. Families will be asked to avoid other public places, monitor for symptoms and get tested if the student becomes symptomatic but will not be required to quarantine.

The Government of Alberta will be offering a targeted rapid testing program for kindergarten to Grade 6 schools experiencing outbreaks, as vaccines are not yet available to this age group.

Tests will initially be provided for distribution to parents and staff starting in late October, and will begin with schools that are on outbreak status with 10 or more

cases of COVID-19 who were infectious while in school over a 14-day period. Rapid testing will be voluntary and tests will be administered at home by parents as a screening tool only for students who are asymptomatic.

New Outdoor Gathering Restrictions

Outdoor private social gatherings are now limited to a maximum of 20 people, with two-metre physical distancing between households at all times. This is a decrease from the previous limit of 200 attendees. This new measure has been implemented to reduce the spread of COVID-19. All other public health measures remain in place at this time. For more information, visit alberta.ca/covid19.

COVID-19 Immunization Update

Eligibility expands for additional COVID-19 vaccine doses

Eligibility for third doses of the COVID-19 vaccine has expanded to include Albertans age 75 and older (born in 1946 or before) and First Nations, Inuit and Métis people age 65 and older (born in 1956 or before).

These newly eligible populations can book a third dose at least six months after their second dose. Appointments can be booked [online](#) at AHS clinics, participating pharmacies and physician clinics, or by calling Health Link at 811. COVID-19 vaccines are also available by walk-in at [participating clinics](#) and pharmacies. Individuals aged 65 and older who live on a First Nations reserve will be able to access third doses through local public health clinics on-reserve.

Those deemed ineligible due to age, or six months have not yet passed since receiving their second dose, are asked to re-book when eligible.

In addition to these newly eligible populations, third doses continue to be available for seniors living in congregate care, for immunocompromised individuals 12 years of age and older with specific conditions, and for travellers going to jurisdictions where Covishield/AstraZeneca or mixed doses are not recognized.

For more information on eligibility, go to alberta.ca/vaccine.

Update on additional COVID-19 vaccine doses for healthcare workers

We've received questions about third doses for healthcare workers. Alberta Health continues to follow recommendations from the Alberta Advisory Committee on Immunization and the National Advisory Committee on Immunization.

Current evidence shows two doses of vaccine provide good protection against severe outcomes for those younger than 75 years in the general population. At this time, the provincial committee has only recommended adding third doses for this older group and for First Nations, Inuit and Métis people age 65 and older. No decisions have been made on expanding third doses to healthcare workers. We will continue

to keep you updated on Alberta Health decisions in this area.

COVID-19 vaccines and fertility

There is no evidence that COVID-19 vaccines cause fertility problems. Studies evaluating male and female fertility metrics after COVID-19 immunization have not identified any harms to reproductive health.

For females, research shows the COVID-19 vaccine is safe for those who are trying to get pregnant and does not increase the risk of miscarriage.

No evidence shows any vaccines, including COVID-19 vaccines, cause fertility problems in males. A [recent small study of 45 healthy men](#) who received an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine (i.e., Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna) looked at sperm characteristics, such as quantity and movement, before and after vaccination. Researchers found no significant changes in these sperm characteristics after vaccination.

Although fever from illness has been associated with a short-term decrease in sperm production in healthy men, there is no current evidence fever after COVID-19 vaccination affects sperm production. Fever can be a side effect of COVID-19 vaccination, as well as a common symptom of COVID-19.

The COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective, and prevent serious illness from COVID-19.

For reliable evidence-based information, refer to the [Alberta COVID-19 Immunization in Pregnancy Factsheet for Practitioners](#) and vaccine and fertility information from the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

Reminder: Get \$100 if you receive your first or second dose by Oct. 14

If you receive your first or second dose of an approved COVID-19 vaccine between Sept. 3 and Oct. 14, you may be eligible to receive a \$100 debit card. After vaccination, register online at alberta.ca/VaccineDebitCard.

Updated Food Donations Policy for Staff

With Thanksgiving upon us, many Albertans are looking to show their appreciation for AHS front-line staff. While we are so grateful for this show of support, AHS has recently updated its policy around accepting donations of food. In accordance with Infection Prevention and Control, AHS employees are currently unable to accept [food donations](#).

Although we cannot accept donations of food, Alberta's food banks can and we ask people to please consider passing your kindness on to them. Many Albertans are turning to their food banks for support right now and these organizations are happy to accept donations in honour of front-line staff. Although monetary donations are preferred so food banks can buy what they need and at a bulk rate, people can also

donate non-perishable food. We would encourage you to visit the website for your local food bank to see how you can help.

If you have any questions about donations to AHS staff, please contact [Foundation Relations](#) for assistance.

Verna's Weekly Video Message — Spotlight on Protective Services

[Protective Services](#) is an important part of our care team, dedicated to ensuring we can deliver safe, quality, patient- and family-centered care to Albertans. During the pandemic, their role has become even more important.

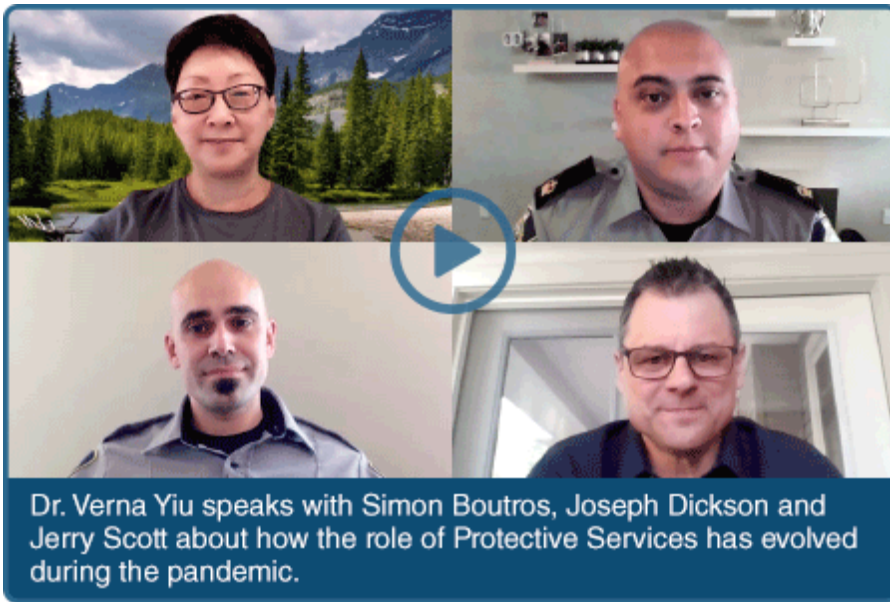
As you may have heard, and some of you experienced, many of our front-line teams are facing harassment from people who do not believe the COVID-19 pandemic is real. They fail or refuse to comprehend the realities AHS staff and physicians are experiencing every day. This harassment is reprehensible and unsettling for all of us, and Protective Services has played a crucial role in responding to these incidents.

Protective Services has created a new role for safety ambassadors, who are responsible for screening, greeting, wayfinding and educating visitors on current AHS visitation policies and COVID-19-related expectations or policies. And more recently, they were instrumental in keeping our people and patients safe during protests at our facilities.

We understand how challenging these protests were for some of our staff, and continue to be grateful for the support of Protective Services, who help guide us through these situations and ensure safety for all.

Joining me (Verna) [to tell us more about their role during the pandemic](#) are:

- Simon Boutros, Site Manager of Protective Services for the Royal Alexandra Hospital and Glenrose Rehabilitation Hospital.
- Joseph Dickson, Protective Services Team Lead at the Rockyview General Hospital.
- Jerry Scott, Chief Protective Services Officer.



Finally, Jerry wanted me to make clear that those individuals who are abusive represent only a small percentage of the hundreds of positive interactions that Protective Services has with patients and families every day.

Updated Health, Business Plan Now Online

The Alberta Health Services (AHS) [2020-22 Health Plan & 2021-22 Business Plan](#) (the Plan) has been published. The Plan is an accountability document that describes at a strategic level the actions AHS will take in carrying out its legislated responsibilities to deliver quality health services.

The Plan was developed with guidance and direction from Alberta Health, and aligns to the Ministry of Health 2021-24 Business Plan, the Blue Ribbon Panel on Alberta's Finances report and the AHS Review. Over the year, AHS will focus on recovering to pre-COVID service levels, improving performance over and above pre-COVID levels and addressing other emerging priorities. Through this new plan, AHS has an opportunity to continue learning and evolving as an organization, and finding ways to better serve patients, clients and their families while maintaining the highest standards of quality and safety.

Big Support for National Day for Truth & Reconciliation

Born out of the Orange Shirt Day movement and in response to the Truth & Reconciliation Commission's Call to Action No. 80, the first National Day for Truth & Reconciliation was recognized last week on Sept. 30. On this day, Canadians are asked to take time to recognize the history and truthful impacts of residential schools. This was an action that many of you took to heart.

Given the current pandemic environment, AHS invited staff and Albertans to participant in online sessions and activities on our [Together4Health \(T4H\) page](#).

- There were more than 3,750 participants in Zoom sessions (and many sites set

- up rooms that would allow teams to watch and discuss the sessions together).
- Five presentation recordings from the day have been posted on AHS YouTube channel. Links to the recordings are posted on the T4H page.
 - More than 1,500 visits were made to the T4H page on Sept. 30.

We encourage people to continue sharing how they are taking steps to grow their awareness and promote reconciliation. Many wonderful ideas have already been shared [here](#).

This has been a very difficult and emotional year, especially with discoveries of unmarked graves near former residential schools across the country. It is wonderful to see our people showing their care and commitment to Indigenous patients and families by pursuing awareness and understanding.

Stollery Turns 20

This month, the Stollery Children's Hospital celebrates 20 years of providing exceptional care for infants, children and youth in central and northern Alberta, as well as acting as a centre for pediatric research. The hospital opened in 2001 with 109 beds and has since grown to 236 beds across three sites, including three neonatal intensive care units located at the Walter C. Mackenzie Health Sciences Centre/University of Alberta Hospital campus, the Royal Alexandra Hospital and the Sturgeon Community Hospital.

The Stollery has among the highest inpatient volumes of any children's hospital in Canada. Stollery care teams see about 300,000 patient visits each year, including nearly 55,000 emergency department visits, and provide more than 12,000 surgeries to children. The Stollery also provides outreach services in rural communities throughout the central and northern parts of Alberta.

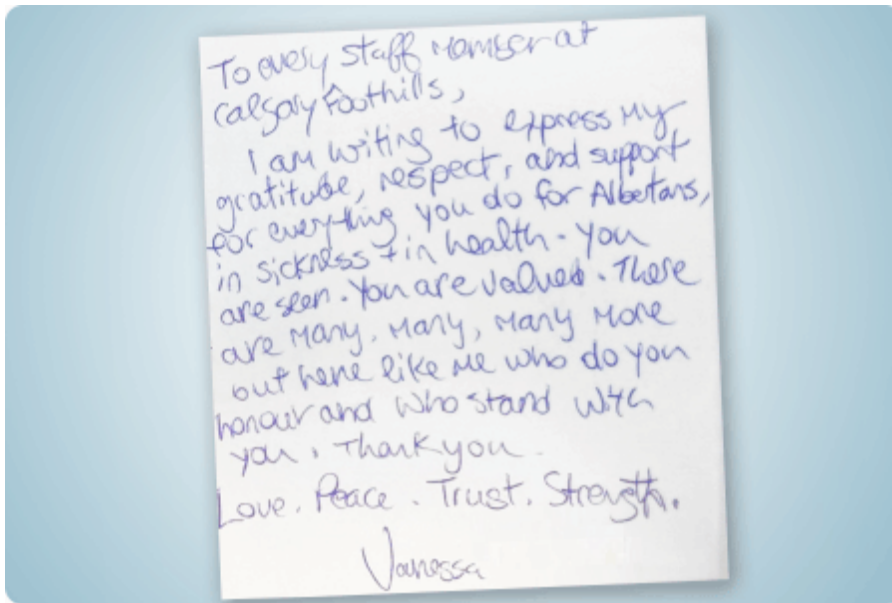
The Stollery is a special place that makes a difference in the lives of children and their families every day. Together let us celebrate this milestone anniversary.

Foothills Medical Centre Cultivates Culture of Kindness

Foothills Medical Centre (FMC) has established a Kindness Crew to inspire and celebrate gratitude, and to bolster spirits during these challenging times. The crew has launched a Leaves of Gratitude campaign to help staff and physicians, as well as members of the public, show their appreciation for the tremendous dedication and compassion healthcare workers demonstrate every day.

The crew has distributed paper leaves to teams to share their specific "Thanks for the Kindness" messages with each other at FMC. Each unit/area is encouraged to create their own display and be creative about sharing joy. It's designed to be a fun and colourful way to show gratitude while enhancing the site with fall colours and kind words.

Members of the community who ask how they can express their gratitude will be given a leaf and encouraged to share their own Thanks for the Kindness messages with staff and physicians. See one below.



FMC's Kindness Crew is comprised of volunteer staff who are focused on cultivating what 'Community of Kindness' means at FMC. The team sends weekly updates to all staff, physicians and volunteers with kindness resources, a message of kindness and an opportunity for showing and spreading kindness. They have also developed a manager's toolkit to provide resources to assist with addressing barriers to kindness, such as compassion fatigue and difficult conversations with vaccination status.

Thanks to the FMC Kindness Crew for encouraging folks to reach out to one another and foster an environment of respect and empathy that improves morale and patient care.

COVID-19 Testing for Healthcare Workers

Testing data for healthcare workers is not available and is expected to return next week.

Be Well - Be Kind

Congratulations to Dr. Powell for Highest Provincial Honour

On behalf of AHS, Laura and I (Verna) would like to pass along our congratulations to Dr. Greg Powell for being named to the Alberta Order of Excellence, the highest honour the Province of Alberta can bestow on a citizen.

Dr. Powell has devoted much of his professional life to providing Albertans with better emergency care. In 1985, he co-founded the Shock Trauma Air Rescue Service

(STARS) and pioneered the use of advanced communications, life-saving technologies, and specialized aeromedical crew training — not just in Alberta but across the country. He retired as STARS President and CEO in 2012; three years later, a helipad was named after him at Foothills Medical Centre, where he served as director of emergency medicine in the late 1970s.

Dr. Powell and his wife Linda are now actively involved in advocacy and public awareness to enhance organ and tissue donation and transplantation in Alberta, and he's also currently serving as a board member on the Health Quality Council of Alberta and the Foothills Country Hospice. Over the years, and to this day, Dr. Powell has been an important partner to AHS, and his passion for excellence in emergency medicine has touched the lives of countless Canadians.

You can read more about Dr. Powell and the other new members of the Alberta Order of Excellence on the [government website](#).

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 wanted to say thank you for taking care of all of us during the COVID-19 pandemic and any other time that we needed your help. I want you to know that my family supports your work ethic to take care of the unvaccinated and vaccinated people out there.

— Judith Turbach

As protesters gather at the Royal Alex for absolutely no good reason, I wanted to thank the ICU team at the Royal Alex for the excellent care they provided my mother-in-law almost 10 years ago. Because of your care, she stayed with us another two years after her time with you. My family and I are grateful for all you are doing now. Stay strong.

— Ken Allan

Wrapping Up — Let's Celebrate Thanksgiving Safely

It's difficult to believe that we're heading into another long weekend, and a Thanksgiving weekend, while still dealing with very high cases of COVID-19.

Last year there was a spike in cases after Thanksgiving, largely caused by people coming together to mark the holiday. This is understandable. We yearn for human contact, particularly during this difficult time when case numbers are so high and necessary restrictions are in place.

We all need to ensure this doesn't happen this year. As you're surely aware, we do not have the capacity to handle another significant spike in cases. If you have a chance to celebrate Thanksgiving this year, please follow the public health restrictions, limit contact with people outside of your household, don't socialize if you are feeling unwell and wear a mask. And please encourage others to do so, too.

We have made some progress in reducing pressure on our healthcare system but that was not without a price. We thank all of you for your sacrifices. Let's make Thanksgiving a safe holiday and let's all continue to support one another.

With enduring gratitude and appreciation,

Dr. Verna Yiu

AHS President & CEO

Dr. Laura McDougall

Senior Medical Officer of Health



Healthy Albertans.
Healthy Communities.
Together.

