



Message from
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AHS Update: Fallen EMS colleague mourned, Health Engagement Tour resumes, take precautions to prevent respiratory illness

Please print and share with your teams as needed

Dear staff, physicians and volunteers,

Today's Update

- **Fallen EMS Colleague Mourned**
- **Our Priorities**
- **Supports When You Need Them**
- **COVID-19 Cases in Alberta**
- **Precautions Can Help You, Others Stay Healthy**
- **AHS Continuous Masking Directive Updated**
- **Interim CEO Video Message — Spotlight on Environmental Public Health**
- **Exclusive Film Access for AHS Staff**
- **Dr. Richard Lewanczuk Receives Platinum Jubilee Medal**
- **Gratitude From Albertans**
- **Wrapping Up**

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.

Fallen EMS Colleague Mourned

This past Wednesday, EMS colleagues said goodbye to one of their own: advanced care paramedic Dallas Boyko.

Dallas was given full EMS honours in a procession that brought together more than 1,000 colleagues and members of the first responder community from EMS, police and fire, from across the province and the country, including representatives from B.C., Ontario, Quebec and New Brunswick.

This was followed by a memorial service with her family, colleagues and many members of the community whose lives were touched by Dallas.

Throughout her distinguished 25-year career, Dallas treated thousands of patients with tremendous courage, compassion and skill. She mentored and precepted hundreds of students and new staff, and made dozens of close friendships throughout her time with Associated Ambulance, Parkland Ambulance and AHS.

As a sign of her tremendous dedication and service, Dallas was awarded the 12-year provincial service medal, in addition to countless commendations from patients, families, peers and supervisors. EMS is incredibly grateful for Dallas's many years of service and we share our deepest condolences with her family, friends, colleagues and all who knew her, on this unimaginable loss.

We would also like to thank advanced care paramedic Mitch Fagnan, who was on duty with Dallas and with her in the collision. Despite his injuries, Mitch selflessly and immediately provided medical assistance to Dallas after the collision. We are enormously grateful for the bravery shown by Mitch and commend him on his actions.

As a reminder, if any staff member needs to talk, wants help, counselling or any other supports, please know we have made our Employee and Family Assistance Plan team available for anyone to access immediately:

- Employee and Family Assistance Program with Homewood Health: 1-877-273-3134
- More information is also available on [Insite](#)
- Critical Incident Stress Management and Peer Support Program: 1-855-512-4127

- Mental Health Help Line: 1-877-303-2642

Action on Our 10 Priorities

The AHS Update message includes the latest information on our COVID-19 response, as well as updates on the progress AHS is making on its [10 priority areas](#). Each edition will include updates on specific initiatives connected to some of the 10 priorities. We have much to accomplish together in these areas, so we want to make sure our teams have the most current information on the work underway and on the work ahead.

Rural Engagement and Initiatives

This work is designed to strengthen partnerships with rural communities, to enhance and better support the rural healthcare workforce, and to better meet the unique needs of Albertans living in non-urban communities.

Minister, AHS leaders tour continues

AHS leadership continues to join Health Minister Jason Copping at a series of engagement events this month and into October. In each community, events are being hosted for internal and community stakeholders who discuss three key questions:

- What is the healthcare system doing well?
- What are the current challenges within the healthcare system?
- What opportunities exist to address challenges?

Events were held this month in Bassano, Cardston, Claresholm, Stettler, Rimbey and Olds. Additional sessions are being held in Calgary, Airdrie, Red Deer, Edmonton, Canmore and Camrose.

A key takeaway from all the events to date has been appreciation for the staff at AHS facilities. Internal stakeholders praise their colleagues for their dedication, and community stakeholders consistently speak of the excellent care they receive when in an AHS facility, or accessing an AHS program or service.

All participants continue to raise shortages of physicians and front-line caregivers as a key challenge impacting service delivery.

Overall, about 700 Albertans have participated in engagement sessions to date.

Priority: Alberta Surgical Initiative (ASI)

The ASI will improve timely access to surgical care in Alberta. The goal of ASI is to ensure adult and pediatric patients receive scheduled surgeries within clinically appropriate timeframes.

Surgical wait-list status update

We continue to work diligently 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 73,550, compared with about 68,000 in February 2020, before the pandemic.

Approximately 111,000 surgeries have been completed in the 2022/23 fiscal year.

Surgical wait-list management project

AHS continues to conduct a surgical wait-list validation project across the province. Through September, patients listed for surgery will receive a phone call, voicemail or automated call from the AHS surgery wait-list management team.

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 number back will not see their position on the wait-list affected.

AHS will never ask for financial information or for any personal information other than the patient's 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. If patients have further questions about their surgery, they are encouraged to contact their surgeon's office.

Priority: Quality and Patient Outcomes

The Quality and Patient Outcomes initiative is focused on continually improving the quality and safety of the care delivered by AHS and enhancing AHS' organizational culture of learning to improve health outcomes and the experiences of patients and families.

Simulation helps staff hone life-saving skills

Whether in a technologically advanced lab, or through the use of mannequins for a safe learning experience, AHS uses simulation to support staff and deliver superior care for Albertans.

When people think of simulation, they often think of fast-paced, high-stress environments. While simulation is valuable in these scenarios, it's equally helpful in many areas beyond emergency procedures. This reality is reflected across the province by the many teams who support simulation-based education for AHS staff. Learn more about simulation on [AHS.ca](#).

Submit Your i4 Launchpad Pitch by Sept. 30

This year's [i4 Conference](#) is on the horizon and with it comes the opportunity to be part of the event's Launchpad competition.

Launchpad supports outstanding innovations aimed at tackling challenges within healthcare, helping new ideas reach a wider audience. This virtual event will showcase the top submissions from each category and will award finalists with mentorship, exposure and grant money. This year, i4 is exploring the future of health and care, untangling historical assumptions from the needs of a modern population.

For more information, visit [i4 Launchpad](#).

Celebrate PFCC Week Oct. 3 to 7

[Patient- and Family-Centred Care](#) (PFCC) is person-focused, collaborative, and each of us has a role to play. PFCC Week kicks off Oct. 3 and we invite you to celebrate partnerships with patients, clients, residents and their families as we continue to advance our Patient First Strategy.

Learn about the [PFCC events](#) happening across the province, [get inspired](#) through stories of PFCC in action, and [register](#) for the keynote webinar on Oct. 3 at noon.

In the keynote, [Bev Johnson](#), President and CEO of the Institute for Patient- and Family-Centred Care, will discuss the essential lessons we've learned during the pandemic and identify opportunities to move forward.

With her knowledge and experience with healthcare systems from around the world, Johnson will share emerging best practices for building effective partnerships, and shed light on strategies that can help us to support AHS colleagues, patients and families in healing, rebuilding trust and working together.

- [Register today.](#)

Supports When You Need Them

Improve Your Mental Health with a Digital EFAP Experience

The [Employee and Family Assistance Program](#) (EFAP) online platform, has been enhanced with a new feature: [Pathfinder](#). This offers you a full digital EFAP experience with several new tools:

- MeetNow: immediate access to a professional for a single session.
- Online screening tool: a clinically validated tool to screen for depression, anxiety, trauma and other presenting issues.
- PulseCheck: use a slider to tell us how you're doing that day and receive a recommendation for a service.
- Pathfinder Journey: triage, assessment and service recommendations based entirely on your unique needs and preferences.
- My Dash: a place where you can start new Pathfinder journeys, access specific

resources, check-in on counselling appointments or simply browse Homeweb.

You can access any of these tools by creating an account online on homeweb.ca or through the [e-App](#). EFAP will continue 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

- On Sept. 19, 843 individuals were in non-ICU hospital beds with COVID-19, compared to 799 individuals on Sept. 5, a 5.5 per cent increase.
- Also on Sept. 19, 26 individuals were in ICU hospital beds with COVID-19, compared to 20 on Sept. 5, a 30 per cent increase.

Variants of Concern

Alberta Precision Laboratories (APL) continues to closely monitor SARS-CoV-2 variants. From Sept. 13 to 19, an average of 60 per cent of positive samples were strain-typed. Of those, the seven-day rolling average was two per cent Omicron BA.2 lineage, four per cent Omicron BA.4 lineage, and 94 per cent Omicron BA.5 lineage.

As global data is updated, sub-lineage designations are refined that might affect lineage calls in Alberta. We continue to monitor our data and adjust as information becomes available. While BA.4 and BA.5 appear to transmit more readily than BA.2 due to their ability to evade immunity from immunization or prior infection, there is no evidence they cause more severe disease than other Omicron lineages.

Wastewater Surveillance

Wastewater can provide an early indication of infection trends in a community. For wastewater surveillance comparing weekly averages:

Eight sites — Lethbridge, Taber, Banff, Canmore, Red Deer & Area, Alberta Capital Region, Edson and Cold Lake — reported abnormally large increases (more than 300 per cent) compared to the weekly average two weeks ago. More time is needed to determine if this is a sustained increase.

The other 12 sites decreased or had no significant changes.

Frequency of reporting updates varies by sampling site. The above interpretations

were made from available data as of Sept. 22 at 8 a.m. The Alberta Wastewater Surveillance Program is a collaboration between the University of Calgary, University of Alberta, APL and Alberta Health.

Other notable COVID-19-related information:

- As of Sept. 19, 4,872 individuals have passed away from COVID-19, including 40 deaths since the last report. We extend our condolences to the families of these individuals, and to all who have lost loved ones from any cause during this time.
- As of Sept. 19, 29,996 individuals have been hospitalized with COVID-19 in Alberta.
- From Sept. 4 to 17, 13,437 COVID-19 tests were completed, a 14-day average of 960 tests per day. During this period, the daily percent positivity ranged from 13.4 per cent to 21.3 per cent.

Things You Need to Know

Precautions Can Help You, Others Stay Healthy

As we enter respiratory virus season, here are a few simple reminders to help ensure you, your families and all Albertans stay as healthy as possible in the coming months.

With public masking no longer mandatory in the broader community, we want to remind individuals that the highest risk of catching any respiratory virus is within crowded, indoor settings, especially those with poor ventilation. While it is not always feasible in the colder months to hold events outdoors, we encourage hosting events outdoors whenever possible.

When attending or hosting indoor activities and events, encourage ventilation within the space whenever possible by opening doors and windows to reduce virus spread.

As always, maintaining physical distance as much as possible is important both at events, as well as in public spaces such as grocery stores and gyms.

Meticulous hand hygiene continues to be important in limiting the spread of viruses and it's critical that anyone feeling unwell, even with minor symptoms, stay home until they feel better.

AHS encourages all individuals to keep vaccinations up to date as we enter the fall months. COVID-19 vaccines and booster doses, including the bivalent vaccine, are available and can be booked online, through pharmacies, or by calling Health Link at 811.

Alberta's influenza program – including for staff – will roll out next month. More to come on launch dates within the coming weeks. We encourage everyone to roll up

their sleeves, stay healthy, and keep others safe as we prepare for the colder months ahead.

AHS Continuous Masking Directive Updated

The [AHS continuous making directive has been updated](#). Unless providing direct patient care, AHS staff attending an AHS-related activity or event on a non-AHS site are encouraged to use their own discretion with regards to continuous masking while following the rules of the individual venue or location.

Interim CEO Video Message — Spotlight on Environmental Public Health

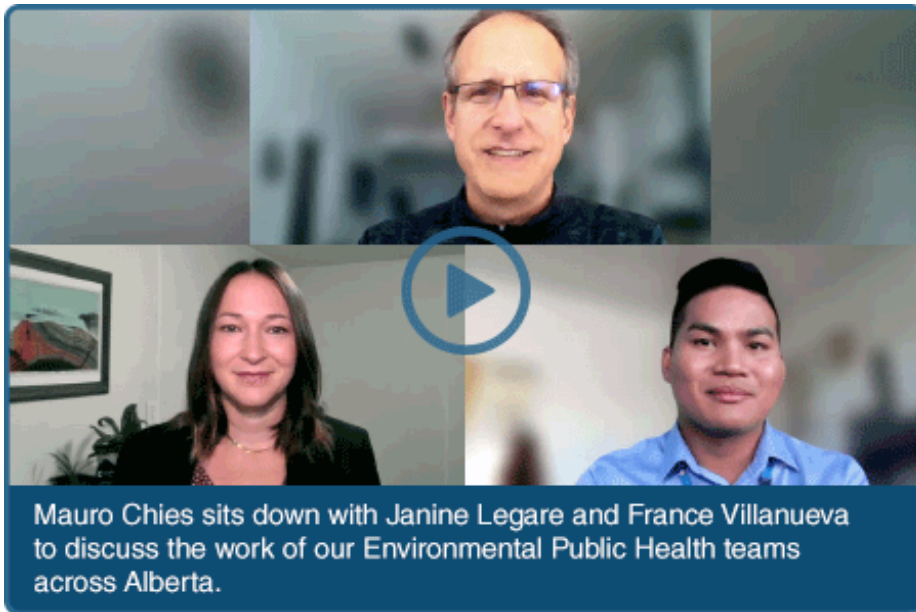
We're so impressed by all our teams have accomplished over the past few years, taking on new work and facing new challenges. Today, we'd like to highlight the work of our Environmental Public Health (EPH) team – or maybe as they are better known, our public health inspectors.

Our 270 inspectors across Alberta have faced tremendous challenges during COVID-19, helping communities and businesses pivot with the changing dynamics of the pandemic. But through it all, keeping Albertans safe in their communities was, and always is, their top priority.

They are critical in safeguarding Albertans from environmental hazards such as foodborne-illnesses, unsafe drinking water and unsafe housing — issues that can cause illness, disease and/or injury. They also ensure compliance with regulations on recreational water, smoke-free facilities, indoor air quality and more, and provide education on various environmental public health topics.

Joining the [AHS Vlog to tell us more about their role and how they help support our people and Albertans](#) are:

- Janine Legare, public health inspector with Healthy Physical Environments
- France Villanueva, a rural public health inspector in Hinton, Alberta



Exclusive Film Access for AHS Staff

The film *Kímmapiiyipitssini: The Meaning of Empathy*, by Elle-Máijá Tailfeathers, chronicles the impact of the opioid crisis on the Blood Reserve in southern Alberta. It focuses on her home, the Kainai First Nation, where her mother, Dr. Esther Tailfeathers, Senior Medical Director for the AHS Indigenous Wellness Core, works to support and educate families affected by the overdose epidemic. The film presents a series of first-hand accounts from local first responders, healthcare professionals, and people with substance-use disorder.

As we approach National Day for Truth and Reconciliation on Sept. 30, we truly hope you take time to experience the film and encourage your staff to watch it with an open heart.



Please [share the video](#) with your teams and don't forget to mark Sept. 29 in your calendars. The Indigenous Wellness Core is hosting virtual education sessions from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. that day to commemorate National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. Join us to learn more about how you can become an ally and support the journey towards reconciliation.

You can find more information on the [National Day for Truth & Reconciliation](#) webpage or join the conversation at [Together4Health](#).

Dr. Richard Lewanczuk Receives Platinum Jubilee Medal

Congratulations to Dr. Richard Lewanczuk, Senior Medical Director, Health System Integration, who was recently awarded her late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II's [Platinum Jubilee Medal](#).

The medals recognize citizens who have dedicated themselves to improving their communities and our province. Dr. Lewanczuk received this honour for his work incorporating the medical needs of seniors with their social needs, as well as his collaborative work with senior-serving agencies in achieving this.

Congratulations to Dr. Lewanczuk!

Be Well - Be Kind

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. You can see messages of gratitude on our [Sharing the Love](#) webpage.

Wrapping Up

This has been an emotional week for the AHS Family, as we mourn the passing of our EMS colleague Dallas Boyko. As we come to grips with this heartbreaking loss, let us treat ourselves and each other with a little extra kindness and patience. Let us also take stock and remember what we all mean to one another; the acts of kindness, loyalty and collaboration that build strong bonds between us.

With enduring gratitude and appreciation,

Mauro Chies

Interim AHS President & CEO

Dr. Laura McDougall

Senior Medical Officer of Health

