

Dear President Rinaldi,

Thank you for your letter and for engaging Alberta Medical Association members in a critically important election. Health care is the most important issue facing our province today, and voters have a choice to make on May 29.

The Alberta NDP won't privatize health care - we will strengthen it. We won't fight with doctors - we will respect, retain, and recruit them. We will fix the health care crisis of today by investing in your members and rebuilding trust.

In the current system, administrative burdens and increasing pressure on the system have left many physicians exhausted and overworked. The UCP's open hostility to doctors and health care workers, especially the decision to tear up the master agreement with doctors, has driven many health care professionals out of the province and even out of the profession.

As the people who show up every day to keep Albertans healthy, it is time you have a government that shows up for you.

### **Health Human Resources**

- *What strategies will your government employ to make Alberta an attractive place for physicians and medical learners to come and stay?*
- *How will your government identify and remove impediments to practice in Alberta for medical learners and practicing physicians?*
- *To help re-establish safe, respectful working environments for health care workers, will your government commit to upholding federal legislation (Bill C-3) to protect our providers in Alberta?*

The Alberta NDP government will:

- Make health decisions based on scientific and medical evidence and expertise.
- Respect health care workers and provide them with resources they need so they want to stay and work here and are valued for their expertise and care.
- Provide supportive billing and funding options to help address the costs physicians are facing, including the cost of overhead for primary care. We will support flexible hours by fairly compensating doctors who choose to offer services on evenings and weekends, as well as supporting virtual care and phone consults.
- Restore a trusting relationship between the government, physicians, and medical learners. The UCP lost the trust of health care workers and have driven them out of the province.

- Undertake the largest health care recruitment and retention campaign Alberta has ever seen. This will include:
  - Creating up to 10,000 new post-secondary spaces specific to health care and related fields over the next four years.
  - Offering signing bonuses up to \$10,000 to attract doctors, nurses, and other allied health professionals. This will help address the overwhelming crisis hospitals are facing across the province.
  - Supporting internationally trained health professionals by doubling the number of residency spaces International Medical Graduates (IMGs) are eligible for; eliminating the need for repeated bi-annual language exams when IMGs have been working in their field in English; and funding additional health care positions that match internationally trained workers' qualifications, while offering access to bridging education.
- Uphold legislation that protects health care workers from bullying and harassment. Everyone in Alberta has a right to feel safe at work. Conspiracy theories have made it less safe for health care workers to do their jobs. This is unacceptable, and we know health care workers deserve better.

### **Care of the Elderly**

- *How will your government ensure Alberta's seniors receive the care they need, when they need it, in their communities so that they can choose to remain at home?*
- *How will your government support family caregivers to better sustain the care they provide, and to maintain their health and well-being?*
- *What will your government do to ensure Alberta's seniors are better cared for in any future public health emergency?*

In terms of direct supports to help seniors stay healthy at home, the Alberta NDP government will:

- Increase capacity for homecare clients by 20,000 over the next four years, and increase links to primary care through expanded team-based care.
- Increase Family and Community Support Services funding by 50%, which can go to programs that give seniors more help at home with things like snow shovelling, yard care, transportation and meal preparation.
- Expand the Seniors Home and Adaptation Repair Program so seniors can make the renovations they need to stay comfortable in their homes.
- Make funding immediately available to all primary care clinics, regardless of funding model, to hire allied health professionals to support patients with complex care needs.
- Support Family Health Teams that wish to specialize in seniors care.

- Fund preventative care by making the shingles vaccine (Shingrix) free to eligible seniors who want it, and adding spouses and dependents back on the Seniors Drug Benefit.
- Invest in affordable housing, including 8,500 new social units and rental assistance. Many of these investments will be targeted to affordable housing with wraparound supports for seniors.

We will also increase the availability of respite care so caregivers can take a break. By investing in team-based and community care, families and caregivers will have greater access to care support and education.

To provide better care in any future public health emergency, we will:

- Base public health decisions on the evidence of medical experts and science, not conspiracy theorists.
- Make continuing care facilities safer by funding and modernising infrastructure to address airflow problems, shared rooms, and other building challenges that increase the risk of infections.
- Improve quality of life and patient well-being in continuing care by addressing workforce issues including inadequate staffing, poor staffing hours and mix, inequitable pay and benefits, and lack of opportunities for full-time positions.
- Hold providers and the government to a higher level of accountability, increasing facility inspections to ensure standards are upheld.
- Re-establish the Seniors' Advocate and make it independent. The presence of an independent Seniors' Advocate was linked to better health outcomes for seniors in British Columbia during the pandemic, and we will make sure an advocate is in place for Alberta seniors.

### **Pediatric Mental Health**

- *How will your government address the pediatric mental health crisis and ensure Alberta's children and youth get the care they need both in schools/communities and the health care system?*
- *How will your government assist parents and families to guide children through their journeys in the mental health care system?*

Paediatric mental health is a significant challenge that requires a comprehensive and immediate response. Recent reports note that children's mental health ER visits are increasing, a surge that began even before the pandemic.

The Alberta NDP government will:

- Offer all Albertans 5 free insured mental health sessions, investing substantially into public access for mental health care and removing key barriers to access. This will be available to children, patients, and caregivers.

- We will ensure schools have more resources for counselling and mental health support. We will also invest more into the school nutrition program to support students' wellness and health.
- We will support the integration of mental health and primary care. The Calgary Mental Health and Addiction Community Strategy identified primary care as being a strategic area to place more mental health support.
- All clinics, regardless of funding model, will have access to hire team-members in the mental health field, including mental health nurses, therapists, social workers, and community navigators.

### **Rural Health Care**

- *How will your government ensure rural Albertans get the care they need, when they need it, in their own communities?*
- *What specifically will your government do to retain physicians in rural and remote areas?*
- *What specifically will your government do to recruit physicians to rural and remote areas?*

Every Albertan should know they can access health care in their home community, where they need it. Under the UCP, there have been a growing number of partial hospital closures across Alberta due to staff and physician shortages. Ambulance shortages in major cities are pulling ambulances away from rural communities that need them, and 800,000 Albertans cannot access a family doctor.

The Alberta NDP government will:

- Prioritize investment in primary care, including providing funding for all clinics to hire additional team members, as well as funding clinics that provide extended hours, which will ease demand on emergency rooms.
- Restore trust with health care workers, treat you with respect, and provide the resources people need to remain and practice here. We recognize how difficult the past four years have been and we will work with - not against - physicians to build a better future in Alberta.
  - We will explore innovative models of teaching, like building a Lethbridge Family Teaching Clinic, which will include a wide range of health professionals and provide obstetric care. We would also consult with the Blood Tribe and Indigenous communities on establishing an Indigenous Centre of Excellence in Primary Care.
- Undertake the largest health care recruitment and retention campaign Alberta has ever seen. This will include:
  - Creating up to 10,000 new post-secondary spaces specific to health care and related fields over the next four years.

- Offering signing bonuses up to \$10,000 to attract doctors, nurses, and other allied health professionals. This will help address the overwhelming crisis hospitals are facing across the province.
- Supporting internationally trained health professionals by doubling the number of residency spaces International Medical Graduates (IMGs) are eligible for; eliminating the need for repeated bi-annual language exams when IMGs have been working in their field in English; and funding additional health care positions that match internationally trained workers' qualifications, while offering access to bridging education.

### **Indigenous Health**

- How will your party improve health equity for Indigenous peoples in Alberta?
- How will your party ensure Indigenous peoples receive the care they need, when they need it, in their own communities?
- How will your government address racism and discrimination in our health care system?
- What will your government do to support Indigenous communities in addressing the opioid crisis?

Indigenous people in Alberta have worse health outcomes than the rest of the Alberta population, due to many immediate factors rooted in colonialism. Some of the chronic challenges include systemic racism, language barriers, and a lack of Indigenous-led care and cultural spaces in health facilities.

The Alberta NDP government will:

- Consult with Indigenous communities on how to best support Indigenous-led health care, including establishing an Indigenous Health Fund for community-led projects. Examples of eligible projects could include community health navigators, and health oversight and complaint investigators who come from, and have the trust of, Indigenous communities.
- Invest \$120 million in the Indigenous Housing Capital program and work with Indigenous communities to create an Indigenous Housing Strategy, which will address social determinants of health and improve health outcomes.
- Build a Family Teaching Clinic in Lethbridge, which will include consultation on establishing an Indigenous Centre of Excellence in Primary Care. This centre would be co-created to train doctors in culturally-appropriate care.
- Collect race-based health data where communities want this, and evaluate changes made in health care to ensure high quality care for Indigenous people.
- Base policy decisions related to the opioid crisis in medical evidence and community consultation. We will fund - and not stigmatize - a range of

necessary services including harm reduction, treatment beds, abstinence options, drug checking, access to naloxone, and recovery.

### **Drug Poisoning Crisis**

- *How does your party plan to deliver a comprehensive continuum of services for people who use substances?*
- *What steps does your party plan to immediately reduce the number of drug poisoning deaths?*

Too many Albertans have died from preventable drug poisoning deaths. Over 1,400 people died in 2022 and over 1,800 in 2021, which is the deadliest year on record. These Albertans are remembered by their friends, family, and loved ones. These tragic deaths demand a robust public health response, with multiple treatment and recovery options available, including harm reduction and accessible mental health services.

The Alberta NDP government will:

- Support evidence based practices and fund - not stigmatize - a range of necessary services, including harm reduction services, treatment beds, abstinence options, drug checking, access to naloxone, and recovery.
- Provide comprehensive, patient-centred care by funding team-based care.
- Invest in essential social supports, including housing 40,000 more Albertans by building social housing and increasing rental supplements; increasing income support; and funding five free insured mental health visits per year for every Albertan.

### **Primary Care**

- *Albertans want access to a family doctor who is connected to a team. How will your party ensure every Albertan has a medical home?*
- *How will your party work to encourage medical students and residents to choose comprehensive family medicine in Alberta?*
- *How will your party financially stabilize and sustain the independent, small-business family practice offices that deliver the majority of primary care, including recognizing the increasing administrative requirements that are burdening them?*

Right now, 800,000 Albertans do not have access to a family doctor. We know that investing in primary care will not only provide better preventative health care access, but will also decrease pressure on ERs and EMS, and lower costs for acute care.

The Alberta NDP government will:

- Take the advice of experts and practitioners in primary care, including the work of the Primary Care Alliances' white paper, "The Integrated Health Neighborhood of the Future: White Paper on Transforming Primary and Community Based Care".
- Support physician-led integrated Family Health Teams, so every Albertan who needs a family doctor can get one.
- Provide \$400 million for new and existing clinics to hire an additional 4,000 allied health professionals and primary care team members.
- Offer supportive billing and funding options that help address costs that physicians are facing, especially the cost of overhead for primary care. We will support flexible hours by fairly compensating doctors who choose to offer services on evenings and weekends, as well as supporting virtual care and phone consults.
- Respect health care workers and provide them with resources they need, so they remain here, and undertake the largest health care recruitment and retention campaign Alberta has ever seen. This will include:
  - Creating up to 10,000 new post-secondary spaces specific to health care and related fields over the next four years.
  - Offering signing bonuses up to \$10,000 to attract doctors, nurses, and other allied health professionals. This will help address the overwhelming crisis hospitals are facing across the province.
  - Supporting internationally trained health professionals by doubling the number of residency spaces International Medical Graduates (IMGs) are eligible for; eliminating the need for repeated bi-annual language exams when IMGs have been working in their field in English; and funding additional health care positions that match internationally trained workers' qualifications, while offering access to bridging education.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to share our plans with you. New Democrats are grateful for the work each of you do for Albertans. We are eager to show up and work for you in return. We will restore the relationship with all physicians and health care workers so we can address the challenges in health care together.

The Alberta NDP