

Rimbey Medical Clinic
PO Box 650, Rimbey, Alberta, T0C 2J0
p. 403.843.2256 f. 403.843.2255
www.rimbeymedicalclinic.com
*denotes professional corporation

Dr. Lisa M. Boéré ~ Dr. Paula L. Burke ~ Dr. Jurie H. deBruyn*
Dr. Christine J. Ellis* ~ Dr. Cian Hackett ~ Dr. Kristen K. Rylance*

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Dear Minister Jason Nixon and Minister Tyler Shandro:

Thank you for meeting over the telephone with the Rimbey physician group and community stakeholders, including Mayor Pankiw and Reeve McLaughlin, on April 24, 2020. We also thank you for the government announcement the same day, of the rollback of many of the changes to rural physician compensation that you enacted March 31 of this year. This announcement reduces the immediate financial stress your government created on our small business.

While we appreciate these positive changes, we continue to have significant concerns regarding the current relationship between your government and Alberta physicians, including the lack of a formal agreement that would ensure stability in the provision of healthcare in our province. We remain concerned about the impact this adversarial relationship has on our ability to provide comprehensive care to our community, to recruit and retain physicians in Rimbey, and to feel confident that we can effectively manage our business without having to worry about the rug being pulled out from under our feet at a moment's notice.

A formal agreement between Alberta doctors, as represented by the Alberta Medical Association (AMA), and Alberta Health IS A NECESSITY. During his April 24 announcement, Minister Shandro suggested that a lack of formal agreement is beneficial because it allowed the government to "pivot" quickly and make changes in response to the outcry of rural physicians to the changes enacted March 31. We would suggest the opposite is true – that the need to rapidly pivot after enacting change is exactly why the government would benefit from input, negotiation and agreement with the AMA. The minister himself admitted the March 31 changes were a mistake due to a lack of understanding about the delivery of rural health care. The AMA knows exactly how rural health care is delivered and would never have agreed to such a mistake in the first place. The consequences of lack of meaningful consultation with the AMA was again evident in the chaos that ensued regarding the Rural, Remote and Northern Program after MED 227 Bulletin was posted on April 24.

We are concerned about the impact of recently imposed changes on the health system as a whole. Even if rural physicians were largely spared by your rollbacks, our patients rely on our urban colleagues to access care. Our health system cannot be divided into urban and rural, without acknowledging that each relies on the other. The urban hospital "Z" codes, visit code caps, and

cancellation of radiologists' contract with Alberta Health Services will deeply impact our patients' access to specialized services, services which rural Albertans already have trouble accessing. Meaningful consultation with the AMA would have mitigated against this impact on patient care.

We were disappointed that much of our conversation involved our government representatives blaming the AMA for the poor relationship that exists between our organizations, blaming the AMA for poor communication with its members, and suggesting that the AMA has not been willing to negotiate and work on our behalf. We would ask to you to review the past 114 years of evidence to the contrary. We would ask you to specifically examine the interaction that resulted in the 2016 Agreement to Amend the AMA Agreement (at a time at which Alberta physicians had no obligation to renegotiate) and the 2018-2020 AMA Agreement. Both of these negotiations resulted in significant overall savings to healthcare expenditures, without negatively impacting patient care. Alberta physicians, ourselves included, remain confident in the work of the AMA, and their ability and willingness to negotiate on our behalf. We reject your proposal that the government should take responsibility to directly communicate with physicians, and ask that you continue to respect our need for representation through the AMA. We also reject your assertion that the AMA is solely to blame for the lack of negotiation.

Due to the lack of stability for physicians without a formal agreement, we still stand to lose several local physicians. The ongoing potential for turmoil is untenable for all Albertans, including physicians. Our ask for stability in the form of a negotiated or arbitrated agreement between the government and the AMA has not changed. Until this happens, rural healthcare in Alberta remains immediately threatened. While we appreciate the attention of our local MLA, we would ask that the Minister of Health direct his discussions with physicians to our AMA representatives.

Lastly, we still have no written reassurance by our government or our local MLA as to a commitment to preserving all health services that currently exist in our community. This remains a joint request of our municipal leaders and physician group.

Once again, we thank you for the small step in reconciling the rift between the government and Alberta physicians, but implore you again, to return to negotiations and restore an agreement between Alberta Health and the AMA. Without this, all Albertans' healthcare remains at risk.

Sincerely,

Dr. Lisa Boeré, MD, CCFP
Dr. Jurie de Bruyn, MB ChB, CCFP
Dr. Paula Burke, MD, CCFP

Dr. Christine Ellis, MD, CCFP
Dr. Cian Hackett, MD, CCFP
Dr. Kristen Rylance, MD, CCFP

CC: Jason Kenney, Premier of Alberta
David Shepherd, NDP Health Critic
Rachel Notley, NDP Leader
Rimbey Town Council and Mayor Rick Pankiw
Ponoka County Council and Reeve Paul McLauchlin
Rimbey Review
Dr. Christine Molnar, President, Alberta Medical Association