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MEDIA RELEASE

## Looming physician exodus from Alberta caused by failed provincial funding framework

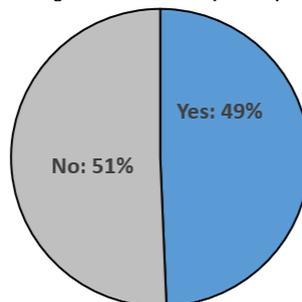
EDMONTON – After months of turmoil and a lack of willingness by the provincial government to negotiate a new contract, many Alberta doctors have reached a breaking point and are looking elsewhere to practice medicine.

According to a newly released survey of physicians by the Alberta Medical Association (AMA), almost 9-in-10 physicians (87%) will be making changes to their medical practices as a result of the funding framework Health Minister Tyler Shandro imposed on physicians. Of this group, an alarming 49% have made plans or are considering looking for work in another province (this represents 42% of all Alberta doctors). One third (34%) of physicians who will be changing their practices say they may leave the profession or retire early, with other alternatives being mulled including changing how they offer services/withdrawing services from AHS facilities (48%), reducing their hours (43%) and laying off staff (34%).

*Of the 87% of physicians making changes to their practices, 49% are considering leaving the province*

Which of the following have you already had to make, or are considering making as a result of the government's imposed changes (not including COVID-19?)

Looking for work in another province/country



Source: TWI Surveys Report: Alberta Medical Association, Your Practice, Your plans: Tell Us How You Are Doing, July 2020  
Note: n=1271

Over the past eight months, relations between the province and physicians have deteriorated to historic lows, driven by an extremely aggressive and inconsistent approach by the Minister of Health.

- It began with the passage of Bill 21, which gave the provincial government license to break any existing contracts with Alberta's doctors, and pre-approval not to live up to the terms of any future agreements they sign.
- In February, the Minister stepped away from the negotiating table, terminated the existing contract with doctors and imposed his own funding framework despite warnings about its consequences by the AMA. Following considerable public and physician backlash, the Minister retreated on many of the provisions of that funding framework, at least temporarily.
- In March, the AMA filed a Charter challenge against the government for bargaining in bad faith and for unilaterally terminating the right to arbitration for physicians (who are considered an essential service).
- On Monday of this week, Minister Shandro introduced Bill 30, which potentially has enormous implications for the medical community without any sort of consultation with physicians or explanation of its intentions. It is seen by many doctors as yet another provocation and attack by the Minister.
- Despite months of efforts by the AMA to get the provincial government back to the negotiating table, to this point they have refused.

Dr. Christine Molnar, President of the Alberta Medical Association, calls the province's actions "reckless," and is concerned about the future of the health care system if this is allowed to continue. "Physicians have reached a breaking point," said Dr. Molnar, "I'm deeply troubled by where this is going and what it's going to mean for medical practices and patients in the coming months."

Dr. Molnar says she understands the anxiety physicians are feeling right now and can't blame them for considering steps to protect their livelihoods. "There are a host of opportunities for physicians across the globe. Alberta's doctors aren't practicing here because they have to, they practice here because they want to. Up until very recently, Alberta was a great place to practice medicine," said Molnar. "I know there is tremendous concern in the profession about how all of this is going to impact patients, and doctors are taking steps to try to preserve patient care as best they can. But the province's approach is making it unsustainable for many of them."

The AMA President says that most physicians are frustrated and mystified by the province's unwillingness to negotiate or even engage with them on important health care policy matters. "Perhaps there's another agenda at play here, but this situation isn't about money. Doctors aren't looking for more. We've made it clear to government that we are willing to work with them to meet their budget targets for at least the next two fiscal years, but they aren't even interested in re-starting negotiations. That's all doctors have been looking for: fair, reasonable, good-faith negotiations and respect for our arbitration rights as essential workers. It's not an unreasonable request, but the answer from the government to date has been a flat 'No'. I'm saddened to see so many of my colleagues are considering a drastic change, but not surprised given the current state of things," said Dr. Molnar.

**Survey Methodology:** Results reported are from a recent AMA member survey, fielded from June 24 to July 3, with a representative sample of 1,470 physicians from across Alberta. With a sample size of 1,470 and using a finite population correction, the survey results are considered accurate within +/- 2.4 percentage points, meaning 19 times out of 20 the survey results are what they would be had the entire population of Alberta physicians participated.

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