



January 26, 2024

Dear Members,

Yesterday, the province announced that Shoppers Drug Mart will be investing \$77 million into adding 44 more pharmacy care clinics across Alberta, with a goal of having 103 clinics in operation by the end of 2024. During the announcement, the Minister of Health noted that the investment will “profoundly impact our province, ensuring greater access to primary care for Albertans and further strengthening our health care system.” You can watch the recording of the press conference [here](#). Further strengthening our health care system seems like a lofty goal to those of us who are in the trenches trying to stop the system from bleeding out.

Although we can all agree our system is under immense strain, the SFM has critical concerns about pharmacy care clinics being positioned as a way to address Alberta’s urgent need for more primary care. Pharmacists are respected team members, but they are not physicians. Full stop. They do not have the clinical training to do exams, or to offer diagnosis and treatment. And they are in no way able to provide the comprehensive care Albertans need and deserve. Suggesting that pharmacy care clinics can provide the same level of care as family physicians is misleading at best and duplicitous at worst.

Further, we have significant reservations about the obvious potential conflict of interest at play here, which allows prescribers to be dispensers. As physicians, we hold true to a fundamental principle that our therapeutic actions should be solely in the patient’s interests and removed from our personal financial gain. This is why physicians may not operate pharmacies. How did such ethical considerations play into yesterday’s announcement?

Family physicians are growing increasingly angry and frustrated as the government continues to offer solutions to the family medicine crisis that do not involve family medicine. That this announcement was made in the same week that an AMA survey showed that 91% of family doctors in Alberta are concerned about the financial viability of their practices simply adds insult to injury. AMA President, Dr. Paul Parks, [released a statement](#) soon after the announcement.

Since the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding in October of 2023, the AMA's Strike Team has been working industriously to provide government with proposals to address Albertans' access to primary care. The speed and urgency of this work was undertaken with the understanding that support for family medicine would be incorporated into the March 2024 Provincial Budget. We are now forced to question whether the government's commitment is wavering.

The government's focus needs to be on stabilizing the family and rural generalist practices that are on the verge of collapse and who still are waiting to receive the \$100 million in stabilization payments that were announced back in December.

The government needs to understand that new, significant, and ongoing investment in family medicine is what is needed to provide Albertans the access to primary care that they deserve.

We know Albertans trust family doctors and want to have a family physician of their own. Yesterday's announcement does nothing to address the urgent need for improved primary care. Introducing more pharmacy care clinics will only serve to silo care and further fracture our health care system.

The answer to the critical question of how to provide access to primary care is simple.

Support family physicians to do the work that they are trained to do.

Sincerely,



Dr. Sarah Bates, Acting President
Section of Family Medicine
On behalf of your [SFM Executive](#)





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12230 106 Ave NW
Edmonton AB T5N 3Z1
Canada*

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