

High-quality care, hard to access: specialist wait times expose system gap

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Edmonton, AB — Specialized medical care is rated highly among Albertans, but long wait times are emerging as one of the most urgent challenges in the province’s health system, according to the Alberta Medical Association’s *State of Health Care – 2026 Report*.

Nearly half of Albertans accessed specialist care in the past year, but demand continues to outpace system capacity. About one in four Albertans report being on a waitlist for a consultation or procedure, and the majority say the wait is too long. These findings show little improvement over time.

While Albertans report high levels of satisfaction with specialist care once they receive it, timely access continues to lag. 70% of Albertans rate the quality of specialist care as good or excellent, yet fewer than half report positive experiences with wait times, and nearly half describe timeliness as poor.

“The data show Albertans value the care they receive from specialists,” says AMA President Dr. Brian Wirzba. “But their experiences are eroded by wait times that are far too long, and we’re seeing a gap between the quality care they receive and their confidence in the system’s ability to deliver that care when they need it.”

Patient feedback makes it clear that long waits are not just an inconvenience — they have real consequences for health. Many patients report delays of months or even years, contributing to worsening conditions, more complex treatment and increased anxiety and uncertainty. These impacts are especially pronounced for those awaiting surgery or diagnostic testing, where delays can be particularly prolonged.

Access challenges elsewhere in the system are compounding the issue. Patients with poor access to a family doctor report significantly longer waits for specialist care, underscoring how gaps in primary care can cascade into delays for essential referrals and treatment.

About the State of Health Care Report

The *State of Health Care – 2026 Report* is produced by the Alberta Medical Association in partnership with ThinkHQ Public Affairs. It provides an annual, evidence-based assessment of patient experiences, system performance and emerging challenges in Alberta’s health care system.

The 2026 report is based on an online survey of 1,100 adult Albertans conducted between May 12 and May 19, 2026, along with qualitative insights from the AMA’s [PatientsFirst.ca](https://patientsfirst.ca) community. The full report will be available on the [AMA website](https://ama.ab.ca) on June 25, 2026

The Alberta Medical Association represents more than 15,000 physicians, residents and medical students in the province. The AMA advances high-quality, patient-centred care by supporting physicians and working collaboratively to strengthen the health care system for all Albertans.

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