

Family doctors remain the foundation of Alberta’s health system, but timely access challenges persist

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Edmonton, AB (June 2026) — Family physicians remain a pivotal point of care in Alberta’s health system, but persistent challenges with timely access are forcing many patients to seek care elsewhere, according to new findings from the *State of Health Care – 2026 Report* released by the Alberta Medical Association (AMA).

More than eight in ten Albertans saw a family doctor in the past year, reinforcing family medicine as the front door to the health system. When Albertans can access that care, satisfaction is high: eight in ten patients rate the quality of their last visit as very good or excellent, consistently describing family doctors as skilled, compassionate and dedicated.

However, access remains uneven. While the proportion of Albertans without a family doctor has decreased slightly to 16% (down from 18% in 2025), nearly three in ten people still searching report that no physicians are accepting patients where they live, highlighting ongoing geographic barriers, particularly in rural and smaller communities.

Even those with a family physician struggle to get timely appointments. Only 53% of patients say they can usually get an appointment when needed, while 16% describe their access as poor or very poor.

As a result, patients are increasingly turning to other parts of the health system. Among walk-in clinic users, 78% say they go because they cannot see their family doctor quickly enough.

“Without access to a family doctor, managing chronic conditions becomes more difficult, and serious conditions go undiagnosed for too long,” says Dr. Brian Wirzba, president of the Alberta Medical Association. “We see more patients turn to emergency departments and urgent care as a point of entry when they can’t access the primary care they desperately need.”

This shift drives higher system costs, increasing wait times elsewhere and disrupting continuity of care as patients are treated by providers unfamiliar with their medical history. Patients themselves report that this fragmentation makes it more difficult to manage their health.

The report also illustrates a clear link between access and overall health system satisfaction. Albertans with good access to their family physician report significantly higher satisfaction (72%) than those still looking (53%).

Together, these findings reinforce the vital role of family physicians – not only in delivering high-quality care, but as system navigators who connect and co-ordinate care across the system.

“Recent improvements such as Alberta’s new primary care compensation model are beginning to take hold, and we’re seeing early signs of improvement in physician availability,” says Dr. Wirzba. “Further progress will require expanding timely access to family physicians and addressing regional disparities.”

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](#) 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.

Media Contact

media@albertadoctors.org