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*Welcome to the most recent issue of Rural Rounds, which includes information and updates for members of the Section of Rural Medicine.*

March 10, 2026

Dear Colleagues,

I was privileged to be at the Alberta Legislature Building on February 26, when the Government of Alberta introduced Budget 2026. It was, as expected a deficit budget, that projects a \$9.4B deficit for the 2026-2027 fiscal year. Budget 2026 included several funding initiatives that will impact rural Alberta, with many focused on infrastructure for schools and hospitals. Stakeholders and partners have expressed concern about some aspects of the budget in relation to its impact on rural communities, and the [Rural Municipalities of Alberta released a statement](#) that details their reaction. It is worth a read for any Albertan who lives and works in rural Alberta.

There are some important funding initiatives that will specifically impact rural health, including \$60 million for the Rural Hospital Enhancement Program over two years, a significant increase from previous years. This funding is intended to improve building conditions and capacity, which will help attract and retain staff in rural areas. It's a welcome investment and one that is long overdue.

Overall, Budget 2026 includes significant investments in health care. According to the Government of Alberta's [Budget highlights document](#), it allocates a total of \$34.4 billion to health care, with \$91 million over the next 3 years earmarked for expanding capacity in emergency departments and operating rooms, \$152 million for continuing care initiatives and \$146 million for continuing care capacity and alternate level of care initiatives. Rural generalists are involved in work that crosses all four health ministries and look forward to working with government to ensure this investment addresses the needs of the rural and remote communities where we live and work.

I had met with Minister LaGrange before the spring sitting of the legislature began and had shared some of the priorities for SRM and its members, and was pleased to hear that

she remains committed to strengthening rural and remote health. I will continue to advocate on the importance of these priorities.

**This week's meetings and Spring 2026 RF**

The SRM will be attending several key meetings this week, including a joint meeting with SFM and the PLE on March 12, which allows us to discuss issues of shared interest. That evening we will be attending the Family and Rural Medicine Meeting, where family and rural medicine RF delegates meet to prepare for the Spring 2026 RF, which takes place on March 13 and 14. We are expecting a busy RF, with sessions planned on topics such as the Year 4 Arbitration Results, Negotiations 2026, and Dual Practice and Private Pay Diagnostics. There will also be a session on the Rural Engagement Working Group (REWG), that I will be presenting, where we will update the RF on where things are at as we reach the mid-point mark of the project. I look forward to reporting back to you on the learnings and actions that come out of this week.

Thank you, as always, for everything you do for your patients, your communities and for the sustainability of rural and remote health.

Regards,  
Dr. Rithesh Ram  
President, Section of Rural Medicine