



August 17, 2021

Dear Family Physicians,

Last month's announcement that the province planned to lift all remaining public health measures by the middle of August was met with incredulity, both here at home and across Canada. Within days of the announcement, the Canadian Paediatric Society, the Federal Minister of Health, the AMA, and several other organizations had written letters expressing concern about lifting public health measures at a time when Alberta is experiencing exponential growth in cases and our vaccination rates remain among the lowest in the country. Many of our members were equally alarmed by the decision and its implications.

Physicians, parents, and other Albertans quickly took to social media to raise awareness of the risks of removing these public health measures, particularly for young children. Protests and marches were held across the province asking the government to continue testing, tracing, and isolating. Primary care physicians were also invited to town halls hosted by the Chief Medical Officer of Health, where they asked questions about the data surrounding the decision, the significant risks to children under 12, and the expectations and implications surrounding the province's plan to direct symptomatic testing to community practices. Unfortunately, those questions often went unanswered.

Not surprisingly, many Albertans welcomed the CMOH's announcement this past Friday that the lifting of public health measures would be paused for six weeks. With non-ICU hospitalizations in Alberta rising faster than anticipated and emerging U.S. evidence about the Delta variant in pediatric populations, the province decided that:

- mandatory masking orders will remain in place for public transit, school buses, taxis, and ride shares,
- a mandatory 10-day isolation will remain in effect for those with a positive test result or COVID symptoms, and
- testing for symptomatic individuals will continue to be available at provincial assessment centres until at least September 27.

Following the press conference, AMA President Dr. Paul Boucher, Section of Rural Medicine President Dr. Samantha Myhr, and myself attended a meeting with the CMOH, the Minister of Health and senior Alberta Health staff as well as AMA and CPSA staff. During this meeting, we shared our support for pausing the lifting of public health measures and discussed some of the flaws in how the initial decision was made. We emphasized the importance of sharing evidence and data with us from the start, so we can understand why policy changes are being advised and ask questions. We stressed the need for consultation with physicians and other health care providers so we can provide input on any future planning. As part of this, we explained that if we had been consulted, we could have cautioned about the extra burden redirecting testing to community practices would create. Throughout the meeting, we were reassured we will have the opportunity to inform future decisions that impact the health of our patients and our practices.

I am hopeful this meeting underscored the importance of why physicians and other health experts must be involved in health policy decisions. I am also encouraged by the groups' willingness to meet again before the six-week postponement on lifting public health measures ends.

We want to hear from you

In the last SFM Bulletin, I introduced the new engagement strategy hosted by the Sections of Family Medicine and Rural Medicine, and the Primary Care Network Physician Leads Executive. The strategy consists of both informal town hall sessions and member and patient surveys. The 90-minute member conversations are intended to encourage discussion about the challenges surrounding practice survivability so we can better focus our advocacy efforts. If you can't attend the scheduled session in your own zone, you are welcome to join a session that better suits your

schedule. Registration is required, so please click on the zone below for the session you wish to attend.

The first session was held on August 11, and the remaining sessions are as follows:

- [South Zone](#): Thursday, August 19 – 5:30 to 7:00 pm
- [Central Zone](#): Wednesday, August 25 – 5:30 to 7:00 pm
- [North Zone](#): Tuesday, September 7 – 5:30 to 7:00 pm
- [Edmonton Zone](#): Thursday, September 9 – 5:30 to 7:00 pm

You can also share your experiences through a confidential member survey, which explores the issues that are most important to you. It is available [here](#) and will remain open until September 15. The patient survey, which is available on [albertapatients.ca](#), focuses on patients' experiences accessing care from their family doctor over the past year and a half. The patient survey opened on August 15 and closes August 31.

I hope you will take the time to participate in the engagement strategy and encourage your patients to complete the patient survey.

If you have any questions about our meeting regarding public health measures or the engagement strategy, please reach out to me directly at sfmpres@albertadoctors.org.

Best regards,



Dr. Craig Hodgson
President, AMA Section of Family Medicine



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*Our mailing address is:
12230 106 Ave NW
Edmonton AB T5N 3Z1
Canada*

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