



August 3, 2021

Dear Family Physicians,

Two years ago, the idea of having our master agreement terminated and seeing a global pandemic arrive just weeks later would have seemed implausible. Unfortunately, that has been our reality over the past 18 months and we have worked tirelessly to adapt to the constant onslaught of changes and challenges. I have heard from many of you that it has been an exhausting and, at times, demoralizing battle and I want you to know how much I appreciate you taking the time to share your experiences. Now, I am hoping more members will have the opportunity to be heard through a new engagement initiative the Sections of Family and Rural Medicine, and the Primary Care Network (PCN) Physician Leads Executive, will be hosting over the next few weeks.

Informal Member Conversations

We will be holding informal member conversations in Zones across the province over the next few weeks. Each of these virtual sessions will run for 90 minutes and will be hosted by SFM, SRM, PLE and some RF Delegate members. The goal is to invite members to share personal stories and encourage open discussion to help us better understand the challenges you are facing surrounding practice survivability and where we should 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.

To register for the appropriate event, click on the zone below for registration and details:

- [Calgary Zone](#): Wednesday, August 11 – 5:30 to 7:00 pm
- [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

Member and Patient Surveys

If you are not able to attend an informal conversation session, please share your experiences through a confidential member survey, which is available [here](#). It is intended to help us understand what you've experienced over the past 18 months, the issues that are most important to you, and how they are impacting your practice survivability. The survey is open now and will remain open until September 15. Feedback from the member survey will be combined with information from patients and reported as key themes that will help guide our advocacy efforts.

The patient survey, which is available on albertapatient.ca, focuses on patients' experiences accessing care from their family doctor over the past year and a half. We encourage you to tell your patients about the survey, which opens on August 15 and closes August 31.

Lifting of Public Health Restrictions

Last week's announcement that government will lift all remaining public health measures as of August 16, raises many serious concerns. The decision to remove mask mandates and isolation requirements, while eliminating contact tracing and closing provincial testing centres is distressing, especially as jurisdictions around the world – including Alberta – are seeing a resurgence driven by the Delta variant. Alberta continues to lag behind on vaccine delivery and we are mere weeks from a return to school with children under 12 still unable to receive the vaccine. AMA President, Dr. Paul Boucher, released a [President's Letter](#) outlining many of those concerns that I encourage you to read if you haven't yet had the chance.

In the days since the announcement, I have heard directly from family physicians who are dismayed by what these changes will mean for them, their practices, and their patients. With the closure of provincial COVID assessment centres on August 31, the CMOH has indicated that Albertans should visit their primary care providers for symptomatic testing. Many fear this will jeopardize physician, staff, and patient safety – particularly for immunocompromised, elderly, and pediatric patients. The increased demand for testing will further burden family practices attempting to address the backlog of illnesses and chronic conditions that have been exacerbated by the pandemic. In addition, there are considerations around the cost of PPE, and questions about tracing and the role family physicians will be expected to play. The CMOH has also emphasized the need for family physicians to discuss vaccine hesitancy to improve vaccine uptake – conversations that are often time-intensive and may be met with hostility and resistance from patients.

The President of the Section of Rural Medicine and I will be attending a multi-stakeholder meeting to discuss these and other issues. We hope to get answers on the expectations for primary care physicians moving forward and what will be contained in the guidelines to inform respiratory illness management that the CMOH mentioned would be coming soon. We will update you with the information that comes out of this meeting.

In the meantime, I sincerely hope you will take the time to participate in our informal conversations and/or member survey, and that you will encourage your patients to complete the patient survey. The ideas and issues that emerge from this engagement initiative will help inform our advocacy efforts and allow us to focus on the most important issues for you and your patients.

If you have any questions about the engagement initiative, or thoughts to share about the lifting of public health restrictions, please email 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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