



December 15, 2021

Dear Family Physicians,

A year ago at this time, most people were relieved to bid farewell to a year that had been unimaginably challenging. After simultaneously battling COVID-19 and urging the government to get back to the negotiating table with the AMA, we looked to 2021 with the hope that better days were on the horizon. Instead, Alberta's physicians have spent this past year working even harder to care for our patients while fighting to keep our practices viable. We are ending 2021 more exhausted than ever but still determined to advocate for our patients and our health care system.

As we head into 2022, I know many of us will find it hard to be optimistic or to imagine a return to normal. Truthfully, things may never be the same. The pandemic and the practice survivability issues we've experienced have changed how we practice, how we interact with patients and forced many of us to make difficult decisions. But I believe it has also shown us how resilient we are and what we are capable of doing. It has brought us together as a profession and reminded Albertans how important it is to have a family doctor and a medical home of their own.

Our recently released engagement initiative report can be found on the [SFM webpage](#) and [SRM webpage](#) (member number required to access). It captures many of the challenges and concerns members have faced over the past two years. The report summarizes the findings of an engagement initiative that SFM, SRM and the PCN Physician Leads Executive undertook in August and September 2021. Informal conversations and an online survey were used to gather member input, and an online survey gathered information from patients. The results, although not surprising, also highlighted the strength of those who shared their stories.

We heard repeatedly that members were reeling from pandemic-related impacts such as the addition of virtual care and the need for enhanced safety measures. We also heard that government decisions such as inadequate remuneration, especially for virtual care and complex care, have severely impacted the financial sustainability of many family practices. These impacts have led to clinic closures, early retirement and even a move away from family practices. Phrases like "burnout," "increased stress," "rising workloads" and "physician shortages" were common. Since its release, the report has sparked reactions from some members, many of whom noted that it reflected their own reality. The SFM Executive will be using the information from the initiative to guide our advocacy efforts in 2022 and beyond.

While the threats to practice sustainability are increasingly urgent, I am inspired by your tenacity and determination as you continue to fight to deliver the care your patients need and deserve. Even as we face financial, professional, and personal pressures, Alberta's family physicians have raised their voices to advocate for Albertans and our health care system. At times, our work puts us at risk from both the COVID-19 virus and those who disagree with pandemic public health measures. And still, we persevere.

With the coming of the new year, I am also hopeful the new Minister of Health is sincere in his efforts to work with primary care to address some of the most pressing issues. We have

already had some productive meetings with him and other government officials, which I expect will continue into the coming year. For the first time in a long time, I believe we are seeing some tangible progress toward establishing a dialogue with government. Although there is still much work to be done, I am optimistic this dialogue will lead to action and return some stability to the health care system.

While I can't promise the year ahead will be easier, I can promise that your SFM Executive will continue to work to advocate on behalf of family physicians. We will use the themes and issues that emerged from the engagement initiative to guide those advocacy efforts and we welcome any other ideas or suggestions you may have. You can reach out to me directly, anytime, at sfmpres@albertadoctors.org.

I also encourage you to take care of yourself and your loved ones amidst the burnout and exhaustion we heard reflected in the engagement initiative. If you, or anyone you know, is struggling, the AMA's [Physician and Family Support Program](#) is available to help 24/7 at 1-877-767-4637.

On behalf of the Section of Family Medicine, thank you for your perseverance, your resilience and your commitment to your patients and our health care system. We wish you and everyone in your life health, safety, and peace this holiday season.

Best regards,



Dr. Craig Hodgson
President, AMA Section of Family Medicine



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