
Health Workforce Strategy

2024



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Executive Summary

Health-care workers are the backbone of Alberta’s health system, dedicated to providing people with excellent care. Maintaining and improving the high quality of care Albertans expect can only be achieved when the health workforce can thrive while being supported and valued.

Meeting the care needs of Albertans has been challenging, especially in Indigenous, rural, and remote communities. Long-standing issues (e.g., difficulty accessing primary care) remain, while emerging trends (e.g., growing demands for mental health services) have put further strain on the already stretched health workforce.

To address this, Alberta Health is taking steps to refocus the health system to put the patient first and to give health-care workers the support they need to provide high-quality care.

The 2024 Alberta Health Workforce Strategy is designed to address the ongoing and evolving pressures affecting the health workforce. It is informed by the unique needs of the province’s health care system and emphasizes the well-being of health care workers and their professional development. It expands the presence of health care workers in critical parts of the health system, fosters collaboration for integrated patient care, and promotes the inclusive empowerment of employees.

Alberta has made progress in providing this essential support for the health workforce, which includes Alberta Health System’s Quintuple Aim—five objectives focused on improving the health of populations, enhancing the patient experience, reducing costs, improving the work life of health care providers, and achieving health equity. This strategy aligns with the provincial goal of building a health-care system that ensures all Albertans receive the care they need, when and where they need it.

Alberta is establishing a new unified health system with sector-based provincial health agencies for primary care, acute care, continuing care, and Recovery Alberta. These provincial health agencies aim to strengthen oversight and coordination, focusing on major areas of need. It also seeks to promote greater collaboration, integration and data information sharing across the health workforce. The Alberta Health Workforce Strategy has five (5) strategic focus areas essential for building and maintaining the health workforce needed to support Albertans’ health and wellness needs:



STRATEGIC FOCUS AREA 1: SUPPORT AND RETAIN

Provide safe, supportive, healthy, inclusive, and engaging workplaces for health workers in publicly funded settings to focus on quality care without compromising personal wellness.



STRATEGIC FOCUS AREA 2: ATTRACT

Attract and grow the health workforce by reducing barriers, optimizing recruitment, and creating effective pathways.



STRATEGIC FOCUS AREA 3: ENABLE

Support the professional growth and career development of the health workforce.



STRATEGIC FOCUS AREA 4: STRENGTHEN

Create more unified models of care across the health system to manage workforce needs.



STRATEGIC FOCUS AREA 5: INNOVATE AND EVOLVE

Empower health care professionals to work to their full scope of practice/full capability within a team-based environment to better meet population needs and system demands. This may include leveraging technologies and information systems to connect health workers to collaborate.



GUIDING PRINCIPLES



Meaningfully engage and serve the healthcare force



Measure and act on people-centric outcomes



Remain responsive to evolving needs and context



Test and scale solutions and innovative approaches

The Path Forward

This strategy must be implemented by leaders and adopted by members of the workforce and stakeholders in sectors across the health system, aligned with changing operational realities and workforce needs, to address persistent workforce challenges. The newly updated strategy will also support the implementation of the Modernizing Alberta's Primary Health Care System (MAPS) recommendations, which include reducing patient wait times and enhancing access to medical education for members of rural, remote, and Indigenous communities, as well as increasing the number of family medicine and generalist physicians.

As the Alberta Health Workforce Strategy is implemented, Alberta Health and the health system organizations and agencies may:

- Pilot and implement initiatives tied to the five Strategic Focus Areas.
- Assess the impact of implemented initiatives on progressing the Alberta Health Workforce Strategy's objectives.
- Scale high-impact and high-value initiatives across the health system where appropriate and successful.
- Report on progress and recalibrate initiatives as required through consistent cross-system engagements.

These steps aim to create an integrated and collaborative health system working towards an efficient, responsive, and sustainable health workforce that provides Albertans with high-quality care when and where they need it.

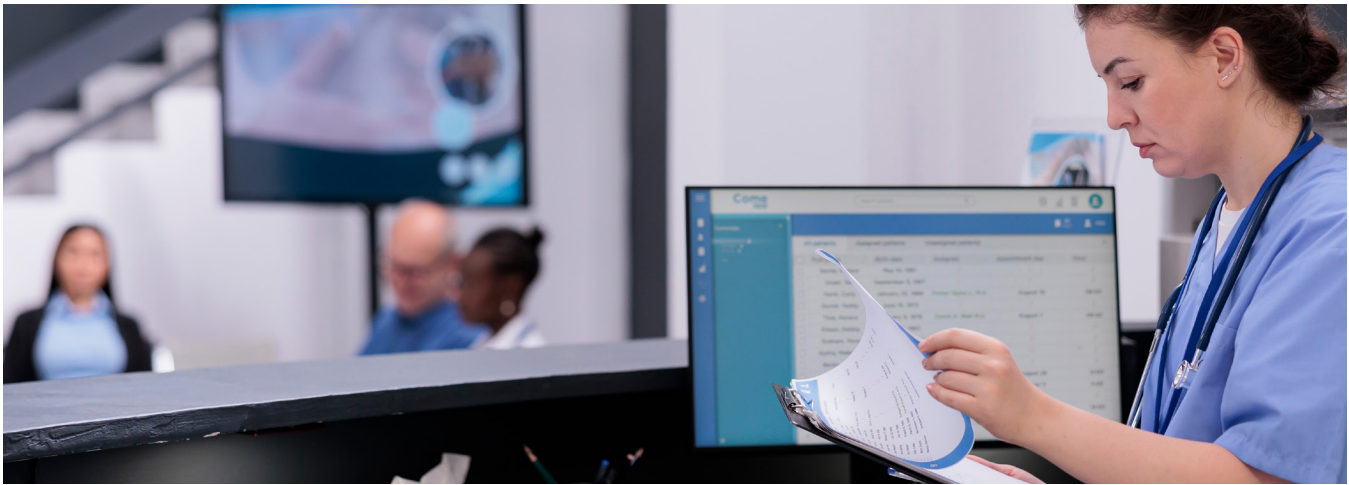
Alberta Health is committed to supporting the maintenance and growth of a health workforce that meets the province's changing needs, now and into the future.

Providing high-quality patient care to Albertans begins with a healthy workforce—one that is supported, cared for, and valued. When the workforce thrives, all Albertans benefit from a high-quality care experience characterized by:

- Access to an appropriate provider or team for primary health care services, making it easy and convenient to get the right care.
- An inclusive environment where the workforce and patients feel safe, respected, and accepted regardless of language, culture, profession, ability, and socio-economic status.
- A holistic approach that focuses on the whole-person, including their physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional well-being.

There is an opportunity to better support health care workers and to reduce the strain and workload. We can strengthen, sustain, and grow our workforce to enable the highest quality care for people.





It is time to do something different.

To truly align quality-of-care expectations, attain greater health equity, and provide the health workforce with what it needs to function optimally, it is critical to rethink when, where and how patients receive care. Every community across the province is unique and as such health workers will need to explore new models of care that determine how scopes of practice best complement one another to improve health equity for all Albertans. The province must:

- **Further strengthen the approach of a health workforce as an interdisciplinary team** accountable for the well-being of Alberta's population—a team that includes social and community care providers, as well as patients and their caregivers.
- **Recognize that the solution is more than just deploying more resources.** It requires a new model of care based on teams that include roles beyond clinical professionals.
- Build a workforce **that values each member and empowers them to use their skills and abilities to their full scope of practice.**
- Adopt an integrated, **one-provincial health workforce mindset and strategically plan for workforce needs** over the next 5, 10, 15+ years.
- Redesign policies to **ensure consistent ways of working and align workforce management** practices across the new sector-based provincial health agencies and the health system.

This strategy has been informed by Albertans, and for Albertans. Over the past year, health care workers, patients, families, caregivers, and community leaders across the province have played a crucial role in shaping the future of health care by participating in one of the largest in-person public engagements ever conducted by Alberta's government. These engagement opportunities have included:

- 65 in-person public engagement sessions, in both rural and urban communities, with over 2,500 participants.
- 14 Indigenous Information Gathering Sessions.
- 2 French language engagement sessions.
- 13 telephone town halls with approximately 10,000 Albertans participating.
- Over 18,000+ Albertans providing feedback through online tools.
- Targeted workshops, interviews, and engagement sessions with leaders within Alberta Health and health system experts across Canada.

What We Heard



“The health system starts and ends with the health workforce. Sure, we can improve how the system functions and that will help, but we have to take care of the workforce or none of the other stuff matters.”



“We need to be supported. We need to feel valued. It’s not just about compensation either - this career needs to be sustainable for ourselves and our families.”



“The workforce and what they need aren’t the same everywhere. We have to address the needs of the workforce differently in rural and remote areas.”



“We need to make sure we aren’t competing against each other. The province must ensure the acute care system isn’t competing for people with continuing care. It’s one province. It’s one workforce.”



“We need to support people who provide care to their loved ones and keep them out of facilities... We can’t forget about family caregivers and non-medical care providers in all of this.”



“This has to be everyone. Health, education, social care, communities, families. That’s how we need to think about how care is provided and how the health system is built.”

There is a need to present an overarching workforce strategy for Alberta Health to provide direction to and for the province’s health workforce. This document sets the overarching strategy and vision to guide, connect, and coordinate the various strategies, plans and actions across all sectors and parts of the health system. Some examples include:

- Implementing recommendations from the Modernizing Alberta’s Primary Care System (MAPS) initiative.
- Developing a new Emergency Medical Service (EMS) Workforce Strategy.
- Creating a Midwifery and Maternal Strategy.

This provincial health workforce strategy acts as a map, providing direction and a path forward for the workforce and organizations in the health system to strategically plan and navigate toward a refocused future where:

- Albertans, regardless of location, can access consistent, world-class health care delivered by a primary care provider and/or their team.
- The health workforce is coordinated and connected to sustainably provide team-based care that treats the whole person.
- Employers across the public health system prioritize the well-being of their workforce while building on their unique perspectives and expertise.
- Qualified professionals are responsive to the health system’s needs, regardless of their training location.
- The health and wellbeing of individual workforce members are prioritized.
- Alberta has a resilient and sustainable health care workforce that can provide every Albertan with access to a “health home” and ensure the right care is available when and where they need it.

There are several common health workforce challenges worldwide, including the recruitment and retention of highly skilled care providers and professionals, increasing levels of burnout and workloads, and responding to increasingly complex health needs. While these challenges are common, it is critical that the solutions and actions be tailored to reflect Alberta's realities, including:

- **Refocusing the health care system in Alberta:** The health workforce strategy, priorities and actions are aligned with broader actions to refocus the health care system, including the creation of new public health agencies and structural changes to governance, oversight, and coordination.
- **Unique realities of health system and the needs of its workforce across Alberta:** The needs of the health system and its workforce vary across Alberta—rural, remote, Indigenous, urban, and suburban communities require tailored solutions that reflect differences in resources, populations, infrastructure, and assets.
- **Changing and growing population in Alberta:** Alberta's population has experienced its fastest growth in over 40 years, adding 204,677 people in the 12 months leading up to April 1, 2024. At the same time, the population is becoming more diverse, with increasing numbers of newcomers and non-permanent residents choosing to live in Alberta. This creates some unique population health needs in Alberta. The number of seniors over the age of 65 is growing faster than any other age group, and by 2051, one in five Albertans will be a senior. The workforce strategy, priorities and actions have been designed to align with these demographic changes.
- **The voices of Albertans:** Thousands of Albertans have informed this strategy through public engagement sessions, telephone townhalls, online feedback forms, and various other channels of engagement.



Strategic Focus Areas



Strategic Focus Area 1: Support and Retain

Provide a safe, supportive, healthy, inclusive, and engaging workplace for health workers in publicly funded settings that helps them focus on providing quality health care, without compromising personal wellness.

Priorities

- 1.1 Create environments where health care providers are valued, rewarded, and recognized fairly and equitably for their work.
- 1.2 Create environments with improved support for workforce safety, well-being, and integration.
- 1.3 Create a more diverse workforce, equitable and inclusive workplace with an emphasis on encouraging everyone to lead, no matter where they work in the health system, and developing leaders that strengthen the workforce and enhance the patient experience.
- 1.4 Reduce uncertainty and provide transparent communication to the health workforce as it transitions to the new sector-based provincial health agencies.



Strategic Focus Area 2: Attract

Attract people to the health workforce and grow capacity where needed by reducing barriers, optimizing recruitment, and creating equal opportunity-pathways for Albertans, other Canadians, and internationally educated workers.

Priorities

- 2.1 Clear pathways to entry to health careers in Alberta.
- 2.2 Improve inclusivity in the health workforce and enhance attraction strategies for Indigenous communities and rural, remote, and underserved areas to improve health equity.
- 2.3 Remove barriers to develop a workforce specifically among those already living in rural and remote areas and Indigenous communities.



Strategic Focus Area 3: Enable

Support the professional growth and career development of the health workforce.

Priorities

- 3.1 Expand opportunities for health care workers to receive ongoing training and development to continue learning new skills and building on current competencies to better meet local needs and health system refocusing..
- 3.2 Create viable opportunities for students and graduates to gain experience in critical areas of need in Alberta.
- 3.3 Create clear career growth and development pathways for health professionals.



Strategic Focus Area 4: Strengthen

Create more unified models of care across the health system to manage workforce needs.

Priorities

- 4.1 Create mechanisms to enhance a coordinated approach to health workforce planning, coordination, and collaboration across the health system, and between partner organizations.
- 4.2 Improve data collection, management, and analysis capabilities to enable evidence-informed workforce planning, management, and investment decision-making both within and across health care professions and sectors.
- 4.3 Partner with post-secondary institutions, colleges, and technical institutions to align health profession learners with health system needs.



Strategic Focus Area 5: Innovate and Evolve

Empower health care professionals to work to their full scope of practice/full capability within a team-based environment to better meet population needs and system demands. This may include leveraging technologies and information systems to connect health workers to collaborate.

Priorities

- 5.1 Provide the right tools and technology to health care providers to enable the workforce to provide care.
- 5.2 Create mechanisms to enhance collaboration and sharing of patient data across the health system.
- 5.3 Provide transitional supports to drive adoption of new ways of working (e.g., team-based care).



Success Measures

Building a resilient health workforce relies on strong partnerships. Alberta Health will work collaboratively with its partners across the health and post-secondary education sectors, and with the communities it serves to achieve the objectives and actions outlined in this Health Workforce Strategy.

As specific initiatives are implemented, Alberta Health will measure progress across each of the five strategic focus areas. Tracking will assess whether the strategy is making a tangible impact in areas such as:

- The number of Albertans with access to a primary care provider.
- The proportion of people over the age of 65 supported to continue living in their homes or community, compared to facilities.
- Access to and use of social and community services, including publicly funded mental health and addiction care.
- The retention and recruitment rate of health care workers, especially in rural and remote regions.
- The levels of engagement, satisfaction, and well-being of existing health care workers across diverse professions and demographic profiles.
- The number of health care workers working to their full scope of practice and capability in the workplace. workers are provided with a competitive and meaningful career path that encourages them to deliver care and services to Albertans over the long-term course of their careers.

Next Steps

Alberta Health remains committed to supporting, caring for, and valuing health care workers, ensuring that Albertans receive the high-quality care they need, and deserve. All organizations and agencies across the health system have a role to play.

As the Alberta Health Workforce Strategy is implemented, Alberta Health and the health system organizations and agencies will:

- Pilot and implement initiatives tied to the five Strategic Focus Areas.
- Assess the impact of implemented initiatives on progressing the Alberta Health Workforce Strategy's objectives.
- Scale high-impact and high-value initiatives across the health system where appropriate and successful.
- Report on progress and recalibrate initiatives as required through consistent cross-system engagements.

These steps aim to create an integrated and collaborative health system that will work towards an efficient, responsive, and sustainable health workforce that provides Albertans with high-quality care when and where they need it.

Appendix 1 - Glossary of Terms & Definitions

Alberta Health is the Ministry of Health that establishes the Government of Alberta's strategic direction for health, including: "advising government on health policy, legislation and standards and public health concerns; monitoring and reporting health system performance; setting policies and priorities for the electronic/digital health environment; and, providing oversight and ensuring accountability across the health system".¹

Continuum of care is a concept involving an integrated system of care that guides and tracks patients over time through a comprehensive array of health services spanning all levels of intensity of care.

Health home is a person-centered model of care that facilitates access to integrated, comprehensive primary health care services across the continuum. This includes primary care, community health services (e.g., public health, home care, allied health/rehabilitation, addiction, and mental health) and community-based social services. A major focus of the health home is to have highly coordinated transitions in care between primary health care, specialist, acute and tertiary care.

Indigenous peoples is a "collective name for the original peoples of North America and their descendants. Often, "Aboriginal peoples" is also used. The Canadian Constitution recognizes three groups of Aboriginal peoples: Indians (more commonly referred to as First Nations), Inuit, and Métis. These are three distinct peoples with unique histories, languages, cultural practices, and spiritual beliefs".²

Patient medical home is an approach to delivering high-quality and comprehensive primary care developed by the College of Family Physicians of Canada. The framework of the patient medical home envisions teams led by Family Physicians to promote partnerships between providers, patients, and families to improve patient health outcomes through communication, engagement, and team-based care.

The Quintuple Aim is a strategic framework that includes five key objectives: improving the health of populations, enhancing the patient experience, reducing costs, improving the work life of health care providers, and achieving health equity. It emphasizes the importance of addressing disparities in health care to ensure that quality improvement efforts are effective for all segments of the population.³

The Quintuple Aim is foundational to our approach to bringing the Alberta Health Workforce Strategy to life, specifically as it relates to health equity and the improvement of work life for clinicians and staff. Its relevance to the Alberta Health Workforce Strategy is significant as it calls for an evolution in how the health workforce is recruited, trained, deployed, and managed.

Scope of practice is the range of health-care tasks, decisions, or activities that a qualified, licensed health-care professional is deemed competent to perform and permitted by their professional colleges to undertake.

Social determinants of health are the non-medical factors that influence health outcomes. They are the conditions in which people are born, grow, work, live and age and the wider set of forces and systems shaping the conditions of daily life.

¹ Government of Alberta. (2023). Ministry Business Plan, Health. Government of Alberta.

² Government of Canada. (2022). Indigenous peoples and communities. Government of Canada

³ Nundy, Shantanu; Cooper, Lisa; Mate, Kedar, "[The quintuple aim for health care improvement](#)," JAMA, January 21, 2022.

Team-based care is a model of health care delivery where interdisciplinary professionals (along with patients and their caregivers) work together to meet a patient's medical needs and promote / enable their physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional well-being.

Trauma-informed care is an approach in the human service field that assumes that an individual is more likely than not to have a history of trauma. Trauma-informed care recognizes the presence of trauma symptoms and acknowledges the role trauma may play in an individual's life, including service staff.

A Whole-person approach is an approach to care that focuses on taking care of the whole person, including their physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional well-being.

Workforce strategy is a tool that organizations use to help them proactively plan for and prepare their workforce to deliver on and achieve strategic goals and priorities. In a workforce strategy it is common to find:

- **Strategic Focus Areas:** areas where an organization thinks effort needs to be made to build and maintain the workforce they need.
- **Initiatives & Action Plans:** usually linked to a Strategic Focus Area, these are the specific steps (or courses of action) that will be taken to address a workforce-related need.
- **Success Measures:** usually linked to an initiative or action plan, these are the indicators that show the level to which the strategy's goals are being achieved.