

The Honourable Tyler Shandro
Minister of Health
423 Legislature Building
10800 97 Avenue
Edmonton AB T5K 2B6

July 30, 2021

EZMSA Office
Suite 201 12315 Stony Plain Road NW
Edmonton, AB
T5N 3Y8

Dear Minister Shandro:

Re: COVID-19 Testing in Physician Offices after August 31st

On July 28th Alberta Health announced in the “Adapting COVID-19 measures to support Albertans” news release that as of August 31st COVID-19 testing would move from assessment centres into primary care, including physicians’ offices. We are writing to express our concerns as community physicians were not consulted on this change.

COVID-19 is Still a Risk

One in four adults and all children under 12 continue to be unvaccinated. The delta variant has reduced the vaccine effectiveness to 85% compared to 91% for alpha and 89% for gamma ([Alberta Health, COVID-19 Alberta Statistics](#)). COVID-19 continues to be a highly transmissible virus and we have vulnerable populations who are not vaccinated. Removing supports is premature as COVID-19 has more severe outcomes than influenza.

Not Safe for Patients

Physician offices are not an appropriate location for testing. We must not expose other patients to COVID-19. Many patients in our offices are ineligible for vaccination or at risk of incomplete vaccine protection due to age or medical conditions. The assessment centres are provided with personal protective equipment, adequate staff, and space for distancing. They have a focus and capacity for COVID-19 safety protocols. Our community physicians are backlogged, recovering from a larger workload due to the delay in care the pandemic has caused. Community offices also do not have the protection of mandatory masking requirements from the provincial government. At this time assessment centres are the correct location to handle COVID-19 testing for Albertans.

No Consultation

This government has frequently, and without consultation, changed processes during the pandemic that impact community physicians. This is another example. Large system changes require collaboration within the system to review the risks, logistics and possible solutions to determine optimal decisions. Planning is required to create smooth transitions and prepare for changes. Proper communication and collaboration is required. Announcing system changes in news releases as the single source for community physicians to be informed is not acceptable for delivering seamless health services.

We find this announcement does not consider the safety of our patients, ourselves, or our staff. It is premature to push such risk on to community offices that do not have the same level of capacity, support, and funding as assessment centres. The assessment centres must continue for the foreseeable future. Periodic reassessment that includes consultation with community physicians must be done before transitioning this service to the broader health system.

Sincerely,

Dr. Cheryl Mack

Vice-President, Edmonton Zone Medical Staff Association

CC: Lorna Rosen, Deputy Minister, Alberta Health
Dr. Deena Hinshaw, Chief Medical Officer of Health, Alberta Health
Dr. Verna Yiu, President & CEO, AHS
Dr. David Zygun, Edmonton Zone Medical Director, AHS
Dr. Paul Boucher, President, Alberta Medical Association