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Crisis in Healthcare: Where is the Provincial Government?

Where is the Alberta government in the health care crisis that has been stretching on for over three years now? Temporary stop gaps to cope with the initial unprecedented demand on the health system have become this government's inappropriate long-term solutions. Conditions in emergency rooms and hospitals are not safe, resulting in serious injuries and even *preventable deaths* of Albertans. Doctors say to this government: **NO MORE**. You should too.

Doctors, nurses, and other healthcare professionals have been beyond stretched for **YEARS** with patient volumes exceeding what is safe for quality patient care. The five major hospitals in Edmonton had family medicine and general internal medicine all above 100% capacity for over a year. In January, these units reached 200% at the Sturgeon Community Hospital, 160-190% at the University of Alberta Hospital and 150% at the Royal Alexandra Hospital, all above regular bed capacity. Care is frequently being delivered in waiting rooms, hallways, and other alternate spaces. On high alert for **YEARS**, we have reached the point as healthcare workers where we must stop damaging our physical and mental health, and demand the government stop risking yours. There is an increase in retirement, sick leave, and reduction of healthcare workers' hours, and this will continue to accelerate. We are burned out, running on fumes, and being asked to perform to superhuman levels for the sake of patients. Physicians are distressed, knowing that patients are often receiving substandard care despite our best efforts.

Driven by the desire to do good and guilt over being unable to meet acceptable care standards, healthcare workers push themselves to do what they can...until they must just stop. We are held hostage by a system that keeps expecting more from us, with fewer resources. Why does the provincial government, your elected representatives, not feel the same responsibility?

The delivery of all health care depends on funding from the **PROVINCIAL AND FEDERAL GOVERNMENTS**. However, the provincial government makes most decisions regarding which health services these funds support. The healthcare system is complicated, with lab and imaging facilities, community family doctors, primary care networks, specialists in the community, as well as the immense amount of work that occurs in hospitals—much of the latter under the jurisdiction of Alberta Health Services. This whole system relies on government funding for resources and a workforce. Where is the additional funding that would make a difference? We need a plan from our government to at least improve the quality of health care back to previous appropriate standards and grow our health system to meet the new sustained demands.

Why are the provincial and federal governments politicking when the federal government has offered additional funding that we desperately need? The federal government has said more money is on the table for provinces if they commit to reforming healthcare and accountability. Despite urgent need, these negotiations have stalled, to the detriment of healthcare workers and patients.

Last year, Alberta had a \$3.9 billion surplus and the provincial government chose not to shore up health care. Instead, Alberta cut healthcare spending by 3.5% in 2022, according to the Canadian Institute for Health Information forecasts. Alberta was leading the country in primary care before aggressive provincial government attacks started in 2019. Many of the current excess pressures on emergency rooms and hospitals could have been prevented by funding innovative solutions, and increasing funding to the relatively less-expensive family medicine. Instead, funding to family medicine was significantly decreased in 2019, with few changes since. The antagonistic government approach and resulting lack of stability took Alberta from a primary care leader in Canada, to being branded a toxic, hostile province to



work in. You only need to look around at your own family and friends to find examples of people who struggle to find a family doctor, get in for an appointment, or who have received letters notifying them that their family physician is leaving.

Healthcare systems across the world are short staffed, but this is not an excuse for our provincial government's inaction and silence. The Alberta government needs to step up for you with a workforce plan for physicians, nurses, lab technicians, and many others. They must provide additional training spots, recruit aggressively, and—most importantly—fight to retain those who are still here. Albertans deserve a robust healthcare workforce to meet the increased demands in our province.

Why are we accepting inaction from the government? Why are we quiet about our emergency rooms being over capacity, with patients waiting in the hallways? Why are we accepting unsafe volumes for care? Why has this become normal? Why is there not a plan for more resources from our provincial government to meet the increased demands that show no sign of slowing down?

So, what can you do? Stop accepting inaction from the Alberta government! Do not wait until it is you or your loved ones who are adversely affected. Call your MLA, the Minister of Health, and the office of the Premier. Contact media with stories of misses and near misses in healthcare. The conditions this provincial government is choosing to tolerate are exacerbating the crisis. Demand more of our government. Your doctors are desperately trying, driven to despair by the unsafe conditions for patients, but we can only do so much without help from this government. Healthcare is in crisis and nearing collapse. Use your voice, as government must listen if enough Albertans demand change. Stand up for yourselves, your loved ones, and your communities.

Dr. Katherine Kasha, President