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## Why is the Alberta Government Hiding its Attack on Healthcare?

**Edmonton, AB:** COVID-19 is exponentially spreading as the Alberta Government hides its attack on healthcare. The Government continues to blanket state that overall spending on healthcare remains the same, plus a \$500 million addition, to sooth the public. However, they neglect to inform the public of what they hide. The devil is in the details of how that money is spent and the way they treat their workforce. They quietly leave out cuts to start March 31<sup>st</sup>, continue their attack on doctors, and have not fixed their errors.

### Cutting Contracts

Complete disregard for agreements is ongoing and undermining the respect for doctors. This Government has law in place that they may cancel contracts without penalty. Quietly, on March 13<sup>th</sup> this Government emailed that they will be cancelling contracts with radiologists in Calgary and Edmonton. As of March 31<sup>st</sup>, they will end the right of doctors to be represented by the Alberta Medical Association (AMA). The AMA advances patient-centered, quality care by advocating for and supporting doctor leadership and wellness. They represent doctors to negotiate for benefits and rates. How can this government claim they are giving the health system everything needed during this pandemic when they do not recognize the right to representation or keep their word?

### Virtual Care Codes-Not Active or Effective

New virtual care codes were announced five days ago. These new codes are faulty because they: 1) are not available to use; 2) continue to be less than in-person visits; and 3) are less than the government-endorsed Babylon app rates. Not only can doctors not use these new codes, but the rates show this Government's treatment of doctors. The Government still has not provided doctors the ability to keep their doors open to provide healthcare for the public.

### Continued Cuts

The Government continues to push through the following cuts on March 31, 2020:

- The Comprehensive Annual Care Plan is no longer funded. Plans are for patients with multiple conditions such as diabetes and obesity to manage and understand their complex medical conditions.
- Driver's Medical Examination fees for people over the age of 74.5 years are no longer funded.
- Diagnostic imaging services referred by a chiropractor, physiotherapist, or audiologist are no longer funded.
- A new maximum number of patient visits per day for doctors in urban locations will start but not in rural Alberta.
- Overhead financial support for doctors when working in an Alberta Health Services facility is changing to an unspecified amount. This support recognizes that doctors, with their own practice, still have overhead to pay while at an AHS facility. Without it, doctors will only work in their practice and stop working in a hospital.
- The number of days doctors can submit their paperwork for payment is changing from 180 days to 90 days.
- Medical Liability Reimbursement for doctors will change to an unconfirmed amount. This is insurance required for all doctors to practice. Certain doctors have higher insurance premiums than others. For example, The Mom Care Docs practice of 14 family doctors in Edmonton will close their doors because they would need to deliver 224 babies per year only to cover their insurance.
- Continuing Medical Education funding for doctors to maintain and enhance knowledge, skills, and competency is ending.
- Good Faith Claims which provide healthcare to patients who cannot provide proof of Alberta Health Care Insurance Plan or Alberta residence will discontinue. This in particular alienates the homeless population and new Albertans. It is very dangerous to not provide healthcare during the spread of COVID-19.

They also plan to change on March 21, 2021:

- The Business Cost Program to cover the costs of office expenses (which have increased over time) will end.
- The Rural Remote Northern Program will no longer support certain communities and the amounts will change for some. This program helps communities in Alberta attract and retain doctors in communities that have difficulty keeping doctors.

The Government of Alberta continues to attack healthcare when they should be working with doctors to protect the public during COVID-19. The AMA has offered various alternatives to meet the Government's budget targets but Government refuses to cooperate. This Government is hitting doctors hard when they are down and preoccupied with the fight of their lives during COVID-19. Family doctors are actively looking at leaving to other provinces where Government values healthcare. The Government does not have the backs of doctors, when doctors have the back of the public.

**About EZMSA:** The EZMSA represents 1,600 doctors for local issues in the Edmonton Zone. The EZMSA works closely with the Alberta Medical Association (AMA); however, these are separate organizations with different mandates. The EZMSA is the formal voice of advocacy for doctors in the Edmonton Zone while the AMA advocates for provincial issues.

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