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Doctors Concerned about Bankruptcy during COVID-19

Edmonton, AB: The Government of Alberta is paying doctors 51-91% less for virtual care than in-person visits. The \$20 per call flat-rate is the lowest in Canada. At a time when social distancing through virtual care is crucial to preventing COVID-19 spread, doctors need to focus on providing the best care and not worrying about closing their practice. If the COVID-19 pandemic continues, many doctors will face the reality that \$20 per call will close their doors.

Alberta fee price change

On March 18, 2020 the Government first allowed doctors to provide broad virtual care by telephone, email and videoconference when possible, to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The fee is capped at \$20 per patient/ per doctor/ per day for all doctors, regardless of the time spent. Family doctors bill \$41 for an in-person visit under 15 minutes and \$59 total for longer visits. The average specialist will bill \$230 for a first visit of an hour and \$79 for follow-up visits of 30 minutes. The \$20 rate is a cut of 51-91% in total pay. After taxes, clinic costs and child care, this will put some physicians in the red. The Government is penalizing doctors for doing the right thing and protecting their patients with virtual care.

Virtual care fee price across Canada

Alberta is failing in comparison with other provinces with the lowest fee across Canada for virtual care during COVID-19. The Northwest Territories virtual care can be more than in-person. The closest rate is \$23.75 in Ontario for a short assessment around 5 minutes, but this is not a direct comparison as Alberta's \$20 rate is for all time lengths. Ontario has tiered amounts that go up to \$170 for 1 hour.

Province/ Territory	AB	BC	ON	SK	MB	NB	NS	YT	PEI	NWT	NFLD	QC	NU
Price per virtual call	\$20 family, specialist	\$34.44- \$109.02 family, psychiatry	\$23.75- \$170 family, psychiatry	\$35-70 family	\$37.40- 49.40 family	\$45 family	\$40.35- \$80.70 family	\$50.70 family	\$36.40- \$57.20 family	virtual more than in- person	No virtual	virtual same as in- person	N/A
Alberta % difference from other province/ territory		42-82% less	16-88% less	43-71% less	47-60% less	56% less	50-75% less	61% less	45-65% less				

Alberta doctors request fair fees for virtual care that are equitable and similar to other provinces. This is a time to focus on providing patients with virtual care. It is not a time to add to the stress of a pandemic by forcing practices to close. The \$20 current rate does not pay for staff, rent, and office bills. The Government is putting doctors in danger of going bankrupt when they need them most.

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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