



Introducing Primary Care- Provincial Health Agency- Refocusing Alberta's Health System

Background

In November 2023, government announced its plan to refocus the health care system to create a unified health system centered around four priority sectors: primary care, acute care, continuing care, and mental health and addiction. This included approval to establish a dedicated provincial health agency for primary care called the Primary Care-Provincial Health Agency (PC-PHA). The PC-PHA will provide primary care providers with leadership to support governance, oversight and coordination of primary care and will achieve the following objectives:

- Provide transparent **provincial oversight and coordination** of primary care
- Ensure **every Albertan is attached** to a primary care practitioner
- Ensure providers and clinics are **accountable** to PC-PHA
- Enable PC-PHA to act as a **provider** of last resort, particularly in chronically underserved and remote communities

Primary Care Initiatives Underway

Current primary care initiatives that will continue to be prioritized and further coordinated through future planning include:

- Investing in Primary Health Care
- Enabling Digital Health throughout Primary Health Care
- Improving System Integration and Quality Improvement
- Strengthen the Primary Health Care Workforce through physician training expansion in rural settings and increased residency seats for international medical graduates

Goals of the PC-PHA:

- Develop and implement **service standards and guidelines** to ensure consistency and quality
- **Create a single governance structure as recommended in the Modernizing Alberta's Primary Health Care System (MAPS)** initiative report to support an integrated team of health care professionals that share data within and across other sectors
- Develop a system that ensures **every Albertan is attached to a primary care provider** and receives timely access to care where and when they need it
- Implement an **accountability framework** and support the development of an alternative compensation mechanisms and equitable funding across the system
- Strengthen capacity and enable tools and new models of care to better **utilize and grow the workforce.**

PC-PHA functional Model

The PC-PHA will be established to play **a new and meaningful role** across the primary care sector as a new provincial health agency. The PC-PHA will be responsible for providing primary care providers with a dedicated organization and leadership to support governance, oversight, and coordination of primary care.

What PC-PHA will and will not do:

PC-PHA will:

- Be the dedicated provincial health agency for primary care in Alberta and not be influenced by demands of acute care
- Engage physicians and provide leadership opportunities to lead peers in change
- Incentivize care models that improve health outcomes and patient experience
- Provide new tools and support existing tools to primary care providers (e.g. Find a Doc, e-referral) that benefit both providers and patients
- Set standards for primary care (e.g. after-hours care) so Albertans have consistent services no matter where they live
- Fund regional primary care networks that bring practitioners together to implement provincial initiatives and address regional needs
- Develop chronic disease care models to reduce the burden of chronic disease on patients and the health care system
- Work with other created PHAs to ensure alignment and facilitate integration across the agencies.

PC-PHA will not:

- Assume ownership or management of existing family practices
 - Set compensation for primary care practitioners
 - Direct physicians on how they organize clinics or provide care
 - Gatekeep referrals, information, or access to specialist care
 - Act as an isolated decision-maker that does not liaise with other sectors
 - Include standards that dictate how to operate clinics
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Once the PC-PHA is fully established, Albertans can expect:

- Improved access to key services so Albertans can avoid visiting the emergency department or being over reliant on acute care services. Improved service access includes:
 - Increased after hours services by
 - leveraging the existing clinics/virtual health service to provide after-hours services to a PCN,
 - Improved access to virtual health by expanding existing virtual health service,
 - Improved access to digital health services by developing and implementing new digital solutions,
 - Improved referrals to specialist care by expanding and improving e-referral,
- Improved access to primary care delivery in underserved communities, specifically rural and remote areas by acting as provider of last resort where needed.
- Increased attachment to a primary care provider through new models of care, including:
 - Funding team-based care approaches (e.g. increased access to nurse practitioners [NPs])
- Improved access to provincial chronic disease management programs, including:
 - Screening, patient education and access to treatment for diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, chronic respiratory conditions, heart disease, etc.

Once the PC-PHA is established, Primary Care Providers (PCPs) can expect:

- Improved coordination and provision of consistent resources and support for PCPs to meet local health needs, including dedicated grant funding for tools to support primary care practices,
- Increased and regular engagement with PCPs (excluding compensation discussions) to:
 - Understand current challenges and areas of opportunity,
 - Discuss and gather feedback on new and existing initiatives to improve care for Albertans,
 - Design targeted engagement activities such as, workshops, and provincial working groups that provide physicians the opportunity to influence the design of key initiatives,
- Improved information sharing with primary care providers and leading practice to:
 - Enable development of clinical standards, pathways, and improve quality improvement resources.