

Accessing quality health care in rural Alberta presents a number of challenges for municipalities and their residents. The AAMDC believes that Rural Albertans deserve a voice in determining how health care services are funded and provided in their communities.

What is the AAMDC's position on the importance of having a municipal perspective on health?

- Health care presents a huge cost to all Albertans, both rural and urban. Designing an innovative, patient-centred, cost-efficient healthcare system will allow for increased funding for other programs in rural communities.
- The presence of hospitals and emergency services in rural communities provides not only health benefits, but broader community benefits. These include attracting new residents, stimulating economic growth, and providing opportunities to educate the new generation of health professionals.
- The Government of Alberta should work to implement the recommendations found in the *Rural Health Services Review Final Report*.

What financial considerations do rural municipalities have with respect to health?

- The ability for rural residents to access health care is of the utmost importance. While increasing efficiency in the health care system is important, it must take into consideration the importance of full-service hospitals and accessibility to health services and their impact on the viability of rural communities.
- Any service changes should account for potential effects on rural communities struggling to recruit and retain health care professionals and maintain health facilities.

Municipalities in rural Alberta are often burdened with the costs to provide peripheral aspects of health care including the costs to attract and retain medical professionals, and transportation to and from healthcare facilities.

What collaborative relationships are essential to rural municipalities in health?

- The AAMDC believes that The Government of Alberta should partner with AAMDC members to include a rural voice in decisions relating to health care issues (ex. physician retention, seniors' care, rural ambulance service, air ambulance providers).
- Effective emergency dispatch systems must optimize efficiency and encompass all rural first responders, including ambulance and fire services.
- It is essential that Alberta Health and Alberta Health Services collaborate with municipalities on decisions related to health or emergency services, as many such decisions have unforeseen local economic, social, and quality of life impacts.
- Rural municipalities must continue to collaborate with relevant professional associations to recruit health care professionals to rural Alberta (ex. Alberta Health Services, Rural Physician Action Plan, College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta).

How does the work of the AAMDC support the sustainability of the health sector?

- The AAMDC champions the rural municipal perspective on health services through regular participation in several province-wide committees (ex. EMS Advisory Committee, Senior's Lodge Advisory Committee).

What current health related issues are impacting rural Alberta?

Physician Medical Professional Recruitment and Retention

- To ensure there is accessible health care in all regions of Alberta, sufficient, funding, staffing, and programming are required to retain and attract medical professionals.
- Rural municipalities and the Government of Alberta should collaborate to design innovative initiatives such as rural internships and increased educational opportunities to attract and retain physicians medical professionals in rural areas.

Accessible Transportation

- For many rural residents with limited mobility, access to transportation is important not only to their health in times of need, but also to ensure they can continue to participate meaningfully in their community.
- Due to low population densities and large service areas, rural municipalities often collaborate with neighbouring municipalities and non-profit or service

organizations to develop accessible transportation services that meet local needs.

Seniors

- Increased operational support of seniors' lodges and other programs is required at the provincial level to keep pace with the rising costs of providing quality care for seniors in rural and small municipalities.
- Aging in place and living independently are important strategies for providing seniors with an opportunity to age with dignity. Funding for home care, assisted living, and accessible transportation for seniors are all key components to supporting rural Alberta's aging population.

Rural Emergency Service

- Rural ambulance service levels must function at a level that reflects regional needs, particularly in light of the centralization of emergency dispatch services.
- Ambulances should be equipped with the necessary technology to communicate with other emergency services during significant emergency events.
- When appropriate, non-ambulance transportation vehicles should be used for clinically stable patients to allow ambulances to be reserved for emergencies. Further, ambulances based in rural areas should be required to return to their home community directly and not be diverted for calls outside of their region.
- Air ambulance service is critical to supporting access to medical services for those in rural areas. Any changes to the agreements between Alberta Health Services and air ambulance service providers must maintain base locations and service levels.
- Changes to health and emergency service levels often have local economic or social impacts. It is critical that the government of Alberta consider these impacts as part of a broad analysis prior to making such changes.

Provincial Information Sharing System for Medical Records

- As many rural residents have to travel to larger centres for medical treatment, a province-wide medical sharing system is needed to ensure medical records are easily accessible while maintaining the privacy of patients.

Rural Hospitals

- Using narrow criteria such as in-take rates does not reflect the value of hospitals to rural communities. Hospitals must be viewed as having health, quality of life, and economic benefits for rural communities.

- Any decisions to close or change service levels in rural hospitals must be accompanied by community consultations and improve the overall quality of rural health care.

For more information, visit www.aamdc.com for **reports** and an online, searchable **Resolution Database** which includes information on all active resolutions and emerging issues related to health.

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