



Joint statement: Dr. Ed Aasman, President, Section of Rural Medicine, Dr. Christine Molnar, President, Alberta Medical Association

We continue to assess the proposals released by government for consultation, including at a special meeting of our Representative Forum today in Calgary. Government's proposals significantly impact comprehensive primary care across the province. This is bad enough. There are also additional cuts for rural physicians in the proposals that are immense. The effect would be absolutely devastating on those practices.

Rural practices are already struggling to remain stable, including attracting and retaining physicians. If implemented, these proposals could severely threaten the viability of those practices.

Rural medicine is uniquely challenging. Fewer than 500 physicians serve a population of around one million Albertans — that's about the population of Edmonton. They provide primary care, preventive medicine, emergency medicine, in-patient care, long-term care, maternity and more 24/7/365. It's not a life for every physician, but it's part of the everyday life of rural Albertans. (On a related note, rural medicine is not a career choice that can successfully be imposed on any physician, as government has enabled itself to do with billing number restrictions under Bill 21 effective 2022.)

Rural patients have relatively fewer supports available in the first place. It's essential that ensuring comprehensive health care delivery to rural Albertans remains a health care priority. Why would anyone want to threaten that?

Think also of the role that rural physician practices play. They are part of the backbone of communities, not to mention the infrastructure of the health care system outside our cities. Rural Alberta contributes 26% of the overall Alberta GDP. In that context, physicians are private business owners and employers. Would government treat any other industry or group this way?

By simply pursuing cost cuts, government would merely shift patients to more expensive areas of the system and in the big cities. This in turn leads to delayed care and a poorer quality of life for rural Albertans.

We will be making all these points and others in our response to government, which we are still preparing for the December 20 deadline.