

**Media Statement from Alberta's Rural Physicians (Rural Sustainability Group):**

We may have caught government's attention, but it appears they still aren't listening.

Yes, rural is hurting. Yes, we need the changes reversed. However, our main message has always been that we need an agreement with access to arbitration to avoid further unilateral decision making by government. Period.

The United Conservative Party has once again announced decisions reached without physicians at the table. This short-sighted approach is what got rural doctors into their current predicament, and we know our specialist/urban colleagues are dealing with similar situations. Only after the negative consequences of their changes were publicized did they take any action. The Alberta Medical Association and individual physicians carefully laid these concerns out for government ahead of time (while suggesting less harmful ways to achieve the same savings), yet they were dismissed. Now they are trying to rebrand partial rollbacks of what they took away as generous "rural supports". We don't buy it – and neither should Albertans.

Health care is incredibly complex. A decision in one area can have far reaching, unintended consequences. The "trial and error" approach of this government is both irresponsible and dangerous. This is especially true now that they can make sweeping changes with the stroke of a pen and without input from those affected.

Will this backtracking on government's behalf change any minds? Perhaps it is enough to keep things viable for some physicians. The damage has been done in those communities with physicians who have already been forced to leave or retire early. We suspect these politically expedient announcements and partial rollbacks will not be enough for most physicians faced with the need to reduce hospital services in July, since we know they can be reversed again at any time. Albertans know we cannot trust this government to uphold its word or its contracts.

We believe that health care should be non-partisan, and fear the potential consequences of government holding unchecked power to alter a system they do not understand. Albertans don't need the instability of major overhauls to health care with each change in government. This is particularly true now, in the midst of a global health crisis. Physicians, through the AMA, have worked in collaboration with government for 114 years, and we will be here long after the UCP is gone. Or at least we hope to be. Everyone has a breaking point, and this government seems determined to push us past ours.

Sincerely (unimpressed),

Drs Ed Aasman, Sam Myhr, and Vicci Fourie