



State of Health Care

2025 Report

Alberta Medical Association

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Who We Are

The AMA and Informed Reform

The Alberta Medical Association (AMA) is the unified voice of physicians in Alberta, representing over 15,000 doctors, residents and medical students across the province. As a professional association, the AMA is dedicated to advocating for quality health care, supporting physicians in their roles as care providers and leaders and promoting the well being of all Albertans.

For generations, Alberta's physicians have been the trusted stewards of medical care. Their expertise, education and decision-making power are essential for delivering the quality care that patients rely on.

This report is part of our commitment to informed reform of the health care system and our interest in evidence-based policy and decision making.

Founded on the principles of collaboration, advocacy and service, the AMA works to ensure that physicians can deliver the best possible care to their patients. The association engages with government, health agencies and the public to address the evolving challenges in Alberta's health care system—advocating for effective policy, sustainable funding and the preservation of the doctor-patient relationship.

Through research, education and policy leadership, the AMA strives to strengthen the health care system, safeguard clinical autonomy and support innovation in the delivery of care. In times of uncertainty and change, the AMA's commitment remains clear: to put patients first and work alongside all partners to build a stronger, more resilient health care system for Alberta.



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Executive Summary

In 2025, Alberta's health care system stands at a crossroads, defined by high demand, significant access challenges and a steadfast commitment from health care professionals.

This inaugural *State of Health Care Report* reveals that Albertans remain deeply engaged with the health system, with 90% of adults using health care services in the past year. The majority report positive experiences: 75% are satisfied with their most recent care and 83% rate visits to their family doctor as very good or excellent. Yet beneath these strong satisfaction ratings lies a persistent story of strain and unmet needs.

Nearly one-in-five Albertans do not have a regular family doctor and difficulties in securing timely appointments are widespread, with just over 54% able to see their family physician when needed. For those without a family doctor, reliance on walk-in clinics and emergency departments is common, driving up wait times and placing additional pressure on acute care settings. The data shows that while quality of care remains high once accessed, the journey to care is often marked by delays and frustration: 58% of emergency department visitors rate timeliness as poor and 42% of acute care specialist patients report unsatisfactory waits.

Issues of access and wait times are indeed common concerns across all aspects of the health care system. Difficulties securing family doctor appointments, serious queuing/wait-time issues in emergency departments and significant barriers to accessing specialist care present similar challenges in different contexts.

Despite these challenges, there are promising signs of change. New initiatives, such as the introduction of the Primary Care Physician Compensation Model, are aimed at bolstering the family medicine workforce and improving access across Alberta.

The health care system in Alberta is under pressure but not without hope. It is a system where satisfaction remains high thanks to the dedication of providers, but where sustainable solutions are urgently needed to ensure that every Albertan can access timely, consistent and high-quality care.

“The system is only still functioning because of the professionalism of the doctors, nurses and other health care providers.”

— **Alberta patient**

Key Findings

- 1 High Usage:** Ninety percent (90%) of Albertans used the health care system in the past year, with family physicians, medical labs and diagnostics being the most common uses.
- 2 Satisfaction:** Seventy-five percent (75%) are satisfied with their most recent health care experience. Satisfaction is higher among those with a family doctor and correlates with timely access. This reflects the value of continuity of care in improving patient outcomes and creating more positive patient experiences.
- 3 Primary Care Access:** Eighteen percent (18%) of adult Albertans do not have a family doctor. Ten percent (10%) are actively seeking one and 4% use walk-in clinics as their primary care option.
- 4 Timeliness and Waits:** Only 54% of those with a family doctor can usually get an appointment when needed. Wait times in walk-in clinics and emergency departments are frequently rated as poor.
- 5 Quality of Care:** Family doctors receive strong ratings, with 83% describing their last visit as very good or excellent. Walk-in clinics and urgent care also receive positive care quality ratings, despite wait times and access issues.
- 6 Emergency and Urgent Care Pressures:** Twenty-seven percent (27%) visited an emergency department in the past year, with 58% rating timeliness as poor and 18% leaving before receiving care.
- 7 Specialist Waits:** Hospital and acute specialty care is excellent but patients are waiting for access in a strained acute care system. Forty-four percent (44%) saw a specialist in the past year, but 42% rated the wait for an appointment as poor. Nineteen percent (19%) are currently on a specialist wait list.



Methodology

This report is based on research conducted by ThinkHQ Public Affairs and insights from the AMA's PatientsFirst.ca community.

ThinkHQ Public Affairs used an online survey of adult Albertans. The survey was fielded from May 28 to June 3, 2025, with a sample size of 1,120. A random stratified sample of panelists was invited to complete the survey from panel partners. The data were weighted to reflect the gender, age and regional composition of Alberta's population according to Statistics Canada. The margin of error for a comparable probability-based random sample of this size is +/- 2.9 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. It is important to note that the accuracy of results may decrease for sub-samples within the data due to smaller sample sizes.

Quotations were received from the AMA's PatientsFirst.ca community.

PatientsFirst.ca is a community of Albertans interested in the future of health care in the province. Its purpose is to gather and amplify patient voices, share experiences and collect feedback that informs the AMA's advocacy. This is a self-selecting sample of people who chose to participate. We do not claim that insights drawn from the PatientsFirst.ca community are statistically generalizable to the entire population, but they are important to understand since they are drawn from Albertans who have engaged with the health care system. Our intent is to compile experiences from a wide variety of Albertans in order to shine light on the challenges we all face.

Health Care System Usage

Health care utilization in Alberta is widespread, with 90% of Albertans reporting that they accessed some form of health care service in the past year. This high level of engagement underscores the essential role the health system plays in the lives of Albertans across all regions, age groups and backgrounds.

The most commonly used services are:

Family Doctors

85%

85% of Albertans visited a family doctor in the past year, making this the most frequently accessed point of care.

Medical Laboratories

74%

74% accessed lab services, reflecting the importance of diagnostics in ongoing care and monitoring.

Diagnostic Clinics

55%

55% used diagnostic imaging or similar services to support their health needs.

Specialists

44%

44% saw a non-family medicine specialist physician, highlighting the significant demand for specialized medical expertise.

Walk-in Clinics

30%

30% of Albertans used a walk-in clinic, an important resource especially for those experiencing barriers to timely primary care.

Emergency Departments

27%

27% visited an emergency room in a hospital, indicating ongoing reliance on acute care services for urgent health concerns.

Hospital Services

15%

15% had an out-patient hospital procedure and 10% had an overnight hospital stay.

Urgent Care Centres

11%

11% sought care at urgent care facilities, which bridge the gap between primary and emergency care.

Nurse Practitioners

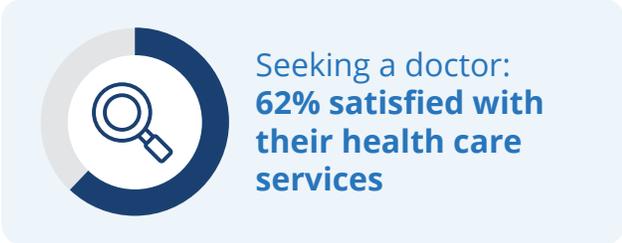
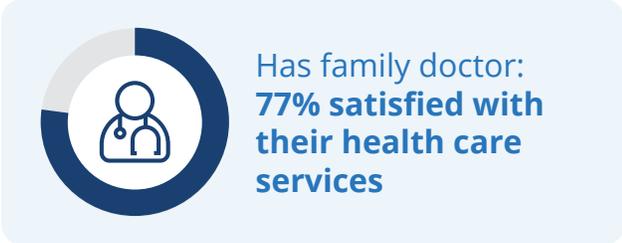
8%

8% received primary care services from a nurse practitioner.

Satisfaction

Overall satisfaction with Alberta’s health care system remains positive, with three-out-of-four Albertans (75%) reporting that they were satisfied with the quality of service received during their most recent health care experience. This includes 23% who were “very satisfied” and 52% who were “somewhat satisfied,” reflecting a general sense of confidence in the care provided.

Satisfaction levels have been relatively stable over time, showing only minor fluctuations. Compared to previous polling, satisfaction was recorded at 73% in July 2024 and 77% in December 2023, indicating consistency in how Albertans perceive their recent health care experiences.



Impact of Having a Family Doctor

Satisfaction with the health care system is notably higher among those who have a regular family physician. Among respondents with a family doctor, 77% reported being satisfied with the care they received. In contrast, satisfaction drops to 62% for those actively seeking a family doctor.

Effect of Timely Access:

Timely access to care also plays a significant role in satisfaction. Those who can secure appointments with their family doctor when needed report higher satisfaction rates compared to those who experience delays or challenges in access.

Demographic Differences

Older Albertans (ages 55+) report the highest satisfaction levels, with 83% satisfied, while younger adults (ages 18–34) and those aged 35–54 are less satisfied, at 70% and 71% respectively. This trend suggests that age and, likely, ongoing relationships with care providers contribute to more positive perceptions.

The majority of Albertans are satisfied with their health care experiences. There remain opportunities to improve satisfaction by addressing access barriers, especially for those without a regular family physician or who face challenges in getting timely care.

Primary Care

Almost one in five (18%) adult Albertans do not currently have a regular family doctor.

Within this group, 10% are actively searching for a family physician but have not been able to secure one, while 4% have turned to walk-in clinics for their ongoing primary care needs. This highlights a critical gap in the availability of consistent, longitudinal care for a significant portion of the population. Among those who are looking for a family doctor, about 23% report that there are no family doctors in their area accepting new patients.

- 10%** are actively seeking a family doctor without success
- 4%** use walk-in clinics for primary care
- 23%** of those looking for a family doctor say there are no doctors taking patients where they live

This ongoing access challenge is a major concern for both patients and providers. However, there is positive momentum for change. In April 2024, Alberta announced a major step forward: the introduction of the Primary Care Physician Compensation Model (PCPCM). This new compensation model is a significant win for family and rural physician clinics—and for all Albertans who rely on them. The PCPCM, developed collaboratively by the Alberta Government and the Alberta Medical

Association, is designed to attract and retain family and rural doctors by providing a more flexible, sustainable approach to physician compensation.

The model blends traditional fee-for-service billing with payments based on time and patient complexity and offsets for time not spent on direct patient care performing related administrative tasks. It also recognizes after-hours care provided to panelled patients in community clinics. This is making it easier for doctors to provide ongoing, comprehensive, personalized care. The expectation is that clinics can remain financially healthy while responding to patient needs. The province has also committed \$57 million over three years to provide family doctors and nurse practitioners with support to help manage costs related to their increasing number of patients. Each provider has the potential to receive up to \$10,000 annually. Additionally, federal transfer funding also flowed to eligible practices, with \$92 million released in April 2024. Improved payment rates under the new model for Family Medicine began April 1, 2025, with approximately 1,000 family physicians already enrolled or in the process of enrolling.

The introduction of the PCPCM is a crucial step toward ensuring the long-term viability of primary care in Alberta. By supporting family and rural generalist physicians with a more adaptable and supportive compensation model, Alberta is working to close the gaps in access and continuity.

Primary Care

Timeliness of Appointments



Just over half (54%) of those who have family doctors can usually get an appointment when they need it, indicating that a substantial portion of Albertans still face barriers to prompt care. 28% describe their access as only “fairly good,” and 17% rate their access as “poor” or “very poor.” Timeliness of access is best among Albertans aged 55 and older, while those aged 35–54, especially those with children, report greater difficulty.

54%

say they can usually get an appointment when they need it

28%

describe their access as only “fairly good”

17%

rate their access as “poor” or “very poor”

Quality of Care from Family Doctors



Despite these access challenges, family doctors receive strong ratings for the care they provide. 83% of Albertans who saw a family doctor in the past year rated the quality of their last experience as “very good” or “excellent.” These ratings are even higher among those who report good access to their physician. For patients who are able to see their family doctor when needed, 93% rate their care highly, while those with moderate or poor access report lower, but still generally positive, ratings.

83%

of Albertans who saw a family doctor in the past year rated the quality of their last experience as “very good” or “excellent.”

93%

of patients who are able to see their family doctor when needed rate their care highly

Primary Care



PatientsFirst Spotlight

Insights from the PatientsFirst.ca community highlight some of the top reasons why many Albertans do not currently have a family doctor. The most common reason given is that no clinics in their area are accepting new patients, leaving many individuals and families unable to secure ongoing primary care. The second most frequently reported reason is that their previous doctor had to leave the area, whether due to relocation, career changes or other circumstances, disrupting continuity of care. The third most common reason is doctor retirement, which has left many patients without a replacement physician. These experiences underscore the ongoing challenges in primary care access across the province.

“Prior to my doctor opening a new clinic in my community, I hadn’t seen a doctor in nine years.”

— Alberta patient



Walk-in Clinics

In the past year, 30% of Albertans reported using a walk-in clinic.

While our survey shows satisfaction and outcomes are stronger when there is an existing relationship with a family doctor. The shortage of family doctors has made walk-in clinics vitally important in Alberta's health care system. There will always be a role for episodic care, but every Albertan deserves a family physician and medical home of their own.

Who Uses Walk-in Clinics and Why?

Walk-in clinics are most often used as a last resort. Among walk-in clinic users:

70% report they turn to walk-in clinics only when they cannot see their regular family doctor quickly enough.

20% use walk-in clinics exclusively because they have been unable to find a family doctor accepting new patients.

7% use walk-in clinics exclusively for convenience.

4% of all Albertans rely on walk-in clinics as their primary source of care.

Walk-in Clinics

Timeliness and Continuity of Care



Timeliness of care is a major concern for walk-in clinic users. Only 31% rate the timeliness of seeing a physician during their last visit as “very good” or “excellent,” while nearly half (48%) rate it as “poor.” Wait times are frequently cited as a source of frustration and these issues tend to be more pronounced among older patients.

31%

say they can usually get an appointment when they need it

48%

describe their access as only “fairly good”

Despite these challenges, walk-in clinics are recognized for providing strong quality of care once a patient is seen:

51% of walk-in clinic users rated the overall quality of care during their last visit as “excellent” or “very good.”

“The wait times were extremely long due to a clear shortage of staff, both doctors and nurses.”

— **Alberta patient**

Emergency Care

In the past year, 27% of Albertans reported visiting an Emergency Department (ED) for care, reflecting both the essential nature of these services and the ongoing reliance on EDs for a range of medical concerns.

Timeliness of Care



A key challenge in Alberta's Emergency Departments is the timeliness of care. Nearly six in ten (58%) of those who visited an ED in the past year rated the timeliness of seeing a physician as "poor," with 29% describing it as "very poor." Timeliness ratings tend to improve slightly with age, but the issue is a concern across all demographic groups.

58%

of those who visited an ED in the past year rated the timeliness of seeing a physician as "poor"

29%

of those who visited an ED in the past year rated the timeliness of seeing a physician as "very poor"

Quality of Care



Despite concerns about wait times, the overall quality of care provided in Emergency Departments is generally rated positively by patients. Sixty percent (60%) of those who visited an ED rated the care they received as "excellent" or "good." This suggests that, once seen by a physician or care team, Albertans have confidence in the skill and professionalism of emergency health care providers.



Emergency Care

Patient Outcomes and Experiences

However, the pressures on Emergency Departments sometimes result in suboptimal patient experiences:

- A significant 18% of those who attended an ED in the past year reported leaving before receiving care, a sign of both the severity of wait times and the frustration experienced by patients.
- An additional 18% said they were treated or kept overnight in a non-traditional hospital space, such as a hallway or storage area. This highlights the issue of overcrowding and the strain on hospital resources, especially during periods of high demand.

Common Themes and Challenges

Patient feedback consistently points to several recurring themes:

- Long wait times, often stretching to many hours, are the most frequently cited concern.
- Overcrowded and uncomfortable waiting areas, with limited amenities, contribute to a stressful environment for patients and families.
- Staff shortages, particularly of both physicians and nurses, lead to increased stress and workload for existing staff, impacting the timeliness and sometimes the thoroughness of care.
- Despite the challenges, many patients praise the professionalism, dedication and compassion of ED staff, even when working under difficult conditions.

Emergency Care



PatientsFirst Spotlight

13,164 Albertans in our PatientsFirst.ca community reported seeking care at an emergency department in the past year. This high level of ED usage reflects both the essential nature of these facilities and the challenges patients encounter when other parts of the health system, such as primary care or specialty care, are difficult to access. In these surveys, 5,805 Albertans told us they waited more than six hours in the emergency department. These extended wait times were noted to result in heightened anxiety, discomfort and in some cases, patients leaving before receiving care. While the majority of patients ultimately describe the care provided by emergency staff as professional and compassionate, the length of time spent waiting remains a significant barrier to timely treatment and positive health outcomes.

“Eight hour wait, then I was in the bed in the hallway and then I was there half the night, for a severe infection [...] health care system is so overloaded with patients and not enough nurses or doctors.”

— **Alberta patient**

Urgent Care

Urgent care facilities are designed to address health concerns that require prompt attention but are not life-threatening emergencies.

In the past year, 11% of Albertans reported visiting an Urgent Care facility.

Timeliness of Care



Just under half (45%) of recent Urgent Care patients rated the timeliness of seeing a physician as “poor,” including 18% who described their wait as “very poor.” By contrast, almost one-third (31%) of patients rated their wait time as “excellent” or “very good,” suggesting that while some patients experience long waits, others are seen much more quickly.

45%

of recent Urgent Care patients rated the timeliness of seeing a physician as “poor,” or “very poor”

31%

of patients rated their wait time as “excellent” or “very good”

“Over capacity rooms should be a rare time use, not almost daily. They are unsafe, cause increased workload for staff and limit privacy for families.”

— **Alberta patient**

Urgent Care

Quality of Care Received



Despite concerns about wait times, Urgent Care Centres receive positive evaluations for the care delivered once patients are seen by a physician. Sixty-eight percent (68%) of respondents rated the quality of care at their last urgent care visit as “excellent” or “good,” while only 11% rated their care as “poor.” This indicates that patients appreciate the skill, professionalism and responsiveness of urgent care staff, even when operational pressures are high.

68%

of respondents rated the quality of care at their last urgent care visit as “excellent” or “good”

11%

of respondents rated the quality of care at their last urgent care visit as “poor”



Specialty Care

Acute care, hospital and community specialist physicians are essential for Albertans dealing with complex, chronic, or advanced health concerns that require expertise beyond the scope of primary care. In the past year, 44% of Albertans reported seeing a specialist physician, highlighting the significant and growing demand for specialty care services across the province.

Wait Times and Access Challenges

Access to specialist care is one of the most prominent challenges in Alberta's health system. 42% of those who saw a specialist rated the wait time for an appointment as "poor," indicating that many Albertans face significant delays before accessing specialist assessment or treatment. These challenges with timeliness are especially pronounced among those under the age of 55 and in larger urban centres like Edmonton, where demand is especially high.

Specialist waitlists remain a serious issue. Nineteen percent (19%) of Albertans report currently being on a waitlist to see a specialist for either an initial consultation or a specific procedure. Among those waiting, the overwhelming majority (85%) believe their expected wait is "too long," with 69% describing it as "far too long."

42% of those who saw a specialist rated the wait time for an appointment as "poor"

19% of Albertans report currently being on a waitlist to see a specialist for either an initial consultation or a specific procedure

85% of those waiting believe their expected wait is "too long"

69% of those waiting believe their expected wait is "far too long"



Specialty Care

Quality of Care



Despite the challenges with timely access, the quality of care delivered by specialists is consistently and highly rated by patients:

72%

of those who saw a specialist in the past year rated the care they received at their last visit as “excellent” or “very good”

10%

of patients provided a poor evaluation of the care received from specialists

“I cannot get into the specialist I was referred to because the waitlist is 3.5 years long.”

— Alberta patient

Specialty Care



PatientsFirst Spotlight

A significant number of Albertans continue to encounter barriers when seeking specialized cancer care. From our community, 567 Albertans reported experiencing difficulties in finding an oncologist to manage their cancer treatment. These challenges can cause delays in diagnosis, interruptions in care and increased anxiety for patients and their families during an already stressful time.

“Over the last six years I have had three different cancers [...] but fortunately chemo, radiation and surgery was able to treat and there are no signs of cancer remaining. Everyone from absolutely every department was fantastic. I did not feel I was at risk within our system, I felt confident in the skills and abilities of everyone involved.”

— **Alberta patient**

We leave you with some questions

We hope that Albertans will find this report card a valuable tool for understanding the current state of our health care system. It reflects our commitment to informed reform and underscores why the AMA undertook this initiative. The data provided will serve as benchmarks as we track progress over time, helping to answer the many important questions that remain. Through ongoing evaluation and reporting, we aim to drive meaningful change that benefits all Albertans.

This report paints a detailed picture of both the strengths and stresses in Alberta's health care system. From these findings, here are some questions to consider for the future:

System Design & Sustainability

- How can Alberta evolve its health system to reduce reliance on emergency care for routine needs?
- What long-term investments are required to sustain the professionalism and resilience of health care workers?
- Should there be more flexibility in the delivery model, such as better integrating virtual care or community-based care hubs?
- How can we stabilize a system that is being reorganized from top to bottom at a time of extreme instability?

Primary Care Gaps

- With a new funding model in place for family physicians, what are the next strategies that can help more Albertans find and keep a regular family doctor and find a medical home?
- What can be done with team-based care to fill gaps into which many patients fall, creating a seamless journey from community primary care to hospital based acute care and back again
- How can recruitment and retention be improved in underserved rural and urban areas?

Access & Wait Times

- What solutions might reduce appointment and diagnostic delays for both primary and specialist care?
- Can data and technology be leveraged to better triage patients and streamline booking systems?
- Should policies prioritize timely follow-up for vulnerable populations, like seniors or those with chronic conditions?

Patient Experience and Equity

- How can system navigation be simplified for those unfamiliar with health care processes?
- Are certain groups disproportionately affected by wait times or lack of care continuity—and what can be done to address that?
- How can Albertans' health care satisfaction be maintained as the system adapts to demand?

Transparency & Evaluation

- What metrics should be used to assess improvements beyond satisfaction ratings?
- How might public reporting and feedback loops be expanded to build trust and accountability?

Physicians as leaders and stewards will work with system partners to answer questions such as these. We look forward to reporting to you again one year from now.



PatientsFirst.ca