

## B14: Attraction and Retention Strategy for Rural Health Care Professionals

Moved by: Town of Hinton  
 Seconded by: Village of Boyle

**WHEREAS** adequate medical services and the professionals required to deliver those services are critical to the safety and well-being of all Albertans;

**WHEREAS** many rural Alberta municipalities<sup>1</sup> find recruiting and retaining health care professionals very difficult;

**WHEREAS** a robust and diverse workforce of health care professionals is needed in Alberta to provide equitable access to appropriate health care services no matter where Albertans live;

**WHEREAS** a cohesive provincial strategy focusing on increasing the number of health care professionals in rural Alberta is critical to ensuring stability and equity in Alberta's health care system; and

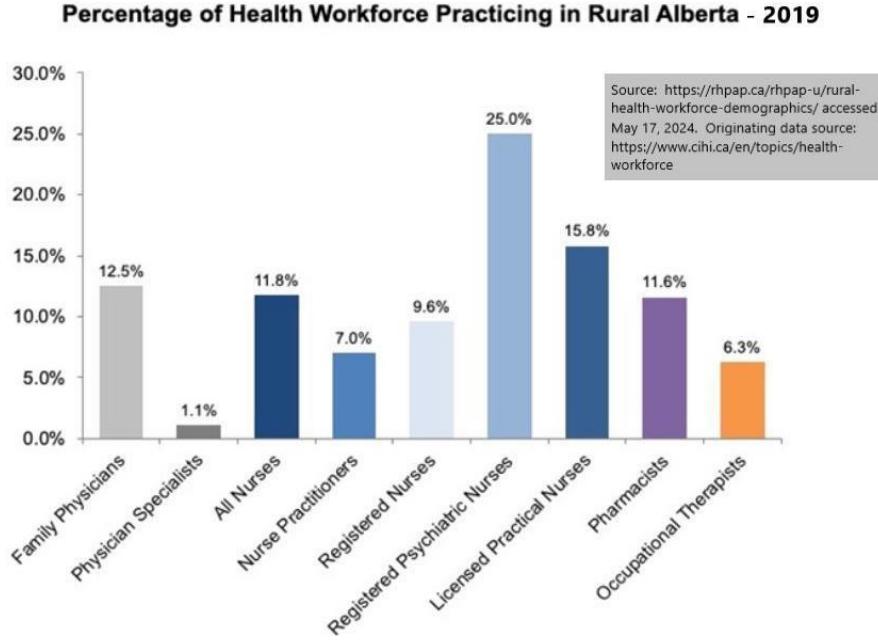
**WHEREAS** health providers across most professional groups are overrepresented in urban areas compared to the proportion of Canadians living in rural areas (which was about 20.5% in 2019), far less than 20% of most health professionals have taken up rural practice.<sup>2</sup>

**IT IS THEREFORE RESOLVED THAT** Alberta Municipalities advocate for the Government of Alberta to develop a Rural Health Care Professionals Attraction and Retention Strategy that focuses on increasing the total number of health care professionals in rural Alberta.

### BACKGROUND:

The lack of health care professionals affects all communities in Alberta but is more acute outside of the major urban centres. Per this graph, nearly all health care professions are underrepresented in rural Alberta, leading to staff burn out, dissatisfaction, and premature retirement as well as relocation to better staffed communities.<sup>3</sup>

In response to the shortage of health care professionals, community-driven attraction and retention initiatives are becoming increasingly common in rural Alberta. Leaders at the municipal, business, and community level recognize that health care services



<sup>1</sup> E.g., communities under 10,000 population. [Rural Health Services Review Final Report \(alberta.ca\)](https://www.alberta.ca/rural-health-services-review.aspx), Rural Health Services Review Committee, March 2015 the Government of Alberta. Accessed May 17, 2024.

<sup>2</sup> [Health Workforce Demographics - Rural Health Professions Action Plan \(rhpap.ca\)](https://rhpap.ca/rhpap-u/rural-health-workforce-demographics/). Accessed May 17, 2024.

<sup>3</sup> [Rural Health Services Review Final Report \(alberta.ca\)](https://www.alberta.ca/rural-health-services-review.aspx), p. 1, Rural Health Services Review Committee, March 2015. Government of Alberta.

are crucial for community sustainability and where health services are not available, growth is unlikely and out-migration of taxpayers, investors, workers, and service providers is inevitable. To avoid a continuously dwindling economy, municipalities are forced to act; and this represents another case of downloading of provincial responsibility onto municipalities left with little choice but to undertake property tax-funded initiatives to try and avoid consequential health care staff shortages and resulting reduction in medical services in their community.

Despite all recruitment efforts, there were still 270 medical service disruption notices issued by Alberta Health Services in 2023. This is empirical evidence that even where health facilities are established, staff to operate them are lacking and the facilities cannot serve Albertans. Local efforts to attract and retain service providers may address immediate community concerns, if successful, but fall short in tackling the broader challenge of addressing the overall scarcity of frontline professionals in a complex and interconnected industry.

Current demographic trends in Alberta will place additional stress on our health care system in our lifetimes unless deliberate action is taken; the following data largely taken from the [Population Projections - Alberta and Census Divisions, 2023-2051](#) noted below, are grim:

1. Alberta leads Canada with a 4.40% year-over- year population growth rate (2022/2023)<sup>1</sup> and is expected to reach 7.1 million people by 2051.
2. By 2051, Alberta's population is expected to reach an average age of 41.6 years, up from 39.0 years today.
3. Life expectancy is anticipated to increase by 4.7 years for females and 6.2 years for males by 2051.
4. The 'baby boom cohort' (people born between 1946 and 1965) will significantly impact the aging rate. By 2031, the number of Albertans aged 65 years and older is expected to make up a larger share of the population than the number of children aged 0 to 14.
5. The over-65 age demographic represents approximately 15% of the population and is expected to increase to 20% by 2051.<sup>2</sup>

#### ALBERTA MUNICIPALITIES' COMMENTS:

The Government of Alberta released a [Health Workforce Strategy](#) in 2023, which includes Objective 2.2 to "attract and recruit health care workers to rural, remote, and underserved areas". If this resolution is passed, ABmunis would look to work with the Government of Alberta and related stakeholders to understand the gap between the current and targeted number of healthcare professionals in rural areas, the targeted timelines, and level of investment to support attraction of healthcare professionals to rural areas. At that point, ABmunis' Board would determine an appropriate advocacy strategy with support from ABmunis' Small Communities Committee and Safe and Healthy Communities Committee.

#### RESOLUTION CONTACT:

Prior to the vote at ABmunis' Convention, any questions about this resolution may be directed to:

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<sup>1</sup> [Annual Demographic Estimates: Canada, Provinces and Territories \(statcan.gc.ca\)](#) Accessed May 17, 2024.

<sup>2</sup> Population Projections Alberta and Census Divisions, 2023 – 2051 [Population Projections - Alberta and Census Divisions, 2023-2051](#) Accessed May 17, 2024.