



Hearts for Healthcare
PO Box 209
#208-4807 51 street
Cold Lake, AB T9M 1P1
Phone: 780-812-1312
W: www.heartsforhealthcare.ca
E: coordinator@heartsforhealthcare.ca

Date: June 4, 2020

Attention: Health Minister, Honourable Tyler Shandro

Re: Community support letter for rural health concerns in Cold Lake, Alberta

We are writing to you today as a concerned community partner, and charitable foundation, committed to supporting local healthcare services. Hearts for Healthcare is a charitable, non-profit organization that strives to improve healthcare services through innovative fundraising, recruitment incentivization, and public awareness and advocacy. Together, with ongoing support from our community partners, we have raised more than \$2.2 million dollars in support of local healthcare. Approximately \$250,000 has been invested into our rural recruitment and retention program and we have successfully recruited 15 doctors, 1 nurse practitioner and 1 sonographer to our community. In addition, we have developed and implemented a successful locum housing program that provides accommodations and assistance to visiting physicians and offers much needed relief to our local doctors.

Despite the economic downturn and recent pandemic our community has continued to be financially supportive of our efforts to purchase much needed equipment; including a ventilator for the Cold Lake Healthcare Centre Emergency Department. This occurred despite the cancellation of our major fundraising event for the year, our 11th Annual H4H Gala. We recognize that our fundraising efforts will be affected by the local and provincial economic downturn, however, we believe that the community will continue to support our efforts in any way they can as long as we remain committed to our mission. It is our hope that our government will support us, our healthcare professionals and our community in these efforts.

This is why today we are requesting your response to a cascade of growing concerns. Healthcare recruitment efforts are difficult for rural areas and the recent changes made to physician funding stand to potentially undermine our efforts. There is an increasing lack of trust in the government's ability to provide ongoing and stable funding of physician services. We expect the loss of 3 physicians in Cold Lake which will produce additional strain on our current local physicians (whom are already over worked and stressed) and other healthcare services. Very soon area residents will suffer the loss of obstetrical services in the neighbouring community of Bonnyville in June 2020, this is a direct result of physicians leaving this community and the inability to recruit replacements. For Hearts for Healthcare this is a massive

concern and we fear more losses to our team are to follow if a resolution cannot be reached. This will affect morale and attractiveness for recruitment and retention of physicians, nurses and other allied healthcare professionals to our community. If we are unable to recruit or retain our physicians, our organization will be unable to fulfill one of our main initiatives and this may affect the financial support we receive from the community and businesses. Can you please respond outlining how this government plans to:

1. Repair the trust broken with the unilateral decision to change the physicians' master contract;
2. Support recruitment of physicians, nurses and other allied healthcare professions that support essential services such as obstetrics, anesthetics and other services.

Rural communities, like ours, require a definitive plan to ensure the sustainability of services provided to our residents in order to maintain the health of our community and economy. This is important not only for the overall well-being of our community members but also for the health, wealth and growth of our local economy. The community will be unable to support economic development if health services do not support the community members who live and work here. If government does not provide stability within our healthcare system, organizations, such as Hearts for Healthcare, face even greater challenges in fulfilling our mission and initiatives.

We thank you for your time and consideration of this important and time sensitive matter. We eagerly await your written response to our concerns.

Sincerely,

The Hearts for Healthcare Board of Directors
CC: Mr. David B. Hanson, MLA for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul