

True North

2017/18 Annual Report



True North
Health Advisory Council

Healthy Albertans.
Healthy Communities
Together.

Message from Alberta Health Services Board of Directors



Dr. Brenda Hemmelgarn

Healthcare is a people business and Alberta Health Services (AHS) alone cannot build a healthier province. Through the work of our Advisory Councils, all Albertans have an opportunity to have a say in what we do at AHS; and that's vitally important to our organization.

Council members bring the voices of Albertans to AHS whether through the geographically located Health Advisory Councils or the program-focused Provincial Advisory Councils and Wisdom Council. They build relationships with Albertans and keep the lines of communication open. They are our partners, and their feedback has helped us make the right decisions on how we care for Albertans and how we deliver health services. Their efforts continue to make a positive difference in people's lives every day.

As Chair of the Community Engagement Committee of the Board, I've had the pleasure to connect with many Council members and see their work evolve and expand over the past year. There are direct links between their efforts and the advancements we've made as a health system overall, and in communities across the province. Here are just a few examples:

- **Connect Care** - members offered insights about the system, and had opportunities to join three different committees to help shape what the system would look like.
- **Zone healthcare planning** - members participated in building Calgary and Central Zone healthcare plans, and sharing specific needs for the communities they represent.
- **PCN governance committees** - members have been invited to join zone committees.
- **Continuing care** - through interviews, council chairs provided comments and suggestions to help build continuing care plans and solutions in the zones.
- **AHS Health Plan and Business Plan** – members offered perspectives and suggestions into the plan; their input shaped the goals, objectives and performance measures, particularly in the areas of long term care and mental health. They also actively shared the plan with communities across Alberta.
- **Special engagement meetings for Albertans** - many of the Councils had the opportunity to host engagement activities from Open Houses to forums to information sessions, both in person or by video conference.

Other milestones include adopting a new look and brand, carefully developed work plans, and attending the Annual Advisory Council Fall Forum to engage about healthcare issues and connect with each other.

On behalf of the AHS Board of Directors, our leadership team, and our workforce, thank you for all you do. We look forward to continuing to work with you on improving healthcare for Albertans.

Sincerely,

Dr. Brenda Hemmelgarn,
Vice Chair, Board of Directors
Chair, Community Engagement Committee of the Board
AHS

Message from the Chair True North Health Advisory Council

On behalf of the True North Health Advisory Council (HAC), I am pleased to submit our annual report for 2017/18.



Michael Osborn

We truly appreciate improvements that have been made to healthcare in our area, as our area continues to establish higher healthcare standards and procedures for our residents. The partnership between True North HAC, AHS, the Northwest Primary Care Network and Northwest Health Foundation continues to be successful, as illustrated by the continuing support for endoscopy and colposcopy programs in our area. These, and other potentially lifesaving programs reduce the need for thousands of travel days for our residents. We are also encouraged by the increased use of Telehealth, giving our residents more access to specialized services without the necessity of travelling long distances.

The feedback we receive from our communities through our five-per-year community meetings and one-on-one get-togethers is very important and valued. A great deal of the feedback we hear centres on improvements and expansion of services within our rural and remote region. The recruitment and retention of qualified health professionals is one of our greatest barriers and we continue to explore opportunities of 'Growing Our Own Health Professionals' with AHS. Our Council is continuing to explore opportunities to improve Indigenous Health Services with AHS as well.

The North Zone is divided into 10 operational areas. Area 1 includes the same communities as the True North HAC. We commend Dr. Heinrich Brussow, Area 1 Medical Director; Angie Mann, Director, Clinical Operations; and Clark McAskile, Executive Director, Northwest Primary Care Network for their hard work and dedication. They continue to make a huge positive difference in services available for our area. We thank our Community Engagement contacts, Mary Mueller and Shannon Gallant and their coworkers, for their dedication and excellent work with us.

I'd like to thank members of our Council for their time, passion, commitment and thoughtful feedback. Together, we will strive to ensure there is always a way to have an active voice in the development of healthcare in our area.

Sincerely,

Michael Osborn, Chair
True North Health Advisory Council

About Our Council

2017/2018 Council Members

Current Members

Michael	Osborn (Chair)	High Level
Eric	Jorgensen (Vice Chair)	Fort Vermilion
Gord	Burnell	High Level
Joyce	Fehr	La Crete
Mary	Janzen	La Crete
Noreen	McAteer	Fort Vermilion
Wendy	Ward	Fort Vermilion
Wilma	Cardinal	Paddle Prairie
Richard (Rick)	Cartier	Rainbow Lake
Dan	Fletcher	Rainbow Lake
Liane	Mercredi	High Level
Waldemar (Wally)	Schroeder	La Crete

Past Members

Wanda	St. Arnault	High Level
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Left to right: Mary Janzen, Eric Jorgensen, Joyce Fehr, Noreen McAteer, Waldemar Schroeder, Wendy Ward

Missing: Michael Osborn, Wilma Cardinal, Richard Cartier, Dan Fletcher, Liane Mercredi,

Priorities for our Council

Our priorities were determined based on the needs of the communities. We have made some progress with the priorities from our 2017/2018 work plan:

Support the recruitment and retention of medical professionals

- Grow our own Registered Nurses (RNs): there are many Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs) in the Council area. Council and AHS would like to find a solution to support the LPNs financially to acquire their RN certification. Council was pleased that the Health Care Aid program was made available in high schools in the Council area.
- Research barriers to recruitment and retention: Council shared feedback about barriers including housing management issues in Fort Vermilion and the low housing allowances.
- Offer housing for staff in remote communities: Council heard from AHS Corporate Real Estate on May 31 at the Rainbow Lake meeting.
- Avoid delays in benefits provided to nurses to support retention.
- Further support physician recruitment and retention in Fort Vermilion.

Access to mental health services for adults and early recognition and proactive intervention for infants, children and youth

- Research into Mental Health First Aid course.
- Mental health provision for children in schools.
- Public uncertainty about availability of mental health services.



For more information about Health Advisory Councils, visit [ahs.ca](https://www.ahs.ca)

Advise/advocate for right services, right place (access to all kinds of care)

- Discussions about recruitment and retention of health professionals: Council members and zone AHS leadership continued to talk about solutions to RN recruitment and physicians for the Council area.
- Support better health outcomes in the area: Council identified areas that need to be focused on to improve health outcomes. One area included the need to recruit staff in health promotion, public health, mental health, speech therapy, and nutrition. The recruitment and retention of physicians also affects health outcomes.
 - Our Chair met with the Director of Addiction and Mental Health for updates about hiring staff for the Council area. We are thankful that the Northwest Primary Care Network continues to expand services available to the Council area, some of which include chronic disease management, perinatal programming and support from a medical social worker.
 - We also met with leaders with the AHS Indigenous Health Program in the North Zone. For better health outcomes, it is necessary for the Indigenous populations to be able to access and receive a seamless set of services. The Indigenous populations need to be engaged in the development of programs to ensure fear and language barriers are addressed, as well as transportation issues.
- Provision of services in Fort Vermilion to the residents in the surrounding communities: there is a need for permanent physicians in Fort Vermilion to support better health outcomes. Currently, physicians rotate in and out for six weeks at a time.

Engaging the public

We are connected to a variety of networks in our communities, and this supports a mechanism to gather community feedback. The communities are in a remote area in the north where access to services is the biggest challenge.

We held five meetings in communities that have AHS facilities, including Fort Vermilion, High Level, La Crete, Paddle Prairie and Rainbow Lake. This year we piloted a new method to draw community members to our meetings. We used our engagement funding to provide a meal at our meetings for the public, and had a good turnout at the meetings in La Crete and Paddle Prairie.

There are pockets in the Council area that have low immunization rates. We were pleased to be able to support the North Zone Area Medical Officer of Health with the delivery of a factual presentation about the importance of immunizations at their meeting in La Crete.

Providing feedback and advice to AHS

We understood the reality of the seriousness of issues when community members shared their stories with us. The Paddle Prairie meeting was postponed once as the community was in mourning due to a series of funerals, with the majority of deaths due to overdoses or suicides. This emphasized the need for increased addiction and mental health services in the community. The Director of Addiction and Mental Health was in attendance.

At the Council meeting in La Crete, 57 people attended to express a need for acute care services closer to home. They explained the travel necessary to access a hospital from La Crete to St. Theresa Hospital in Fort Vermilion is 44 km, and to the Northwest Regional Health Centre in High Level, 117 km. Expectant mothers must travel to High Level for labour and delivery services, and concerns were raised that some babies are born in ambulances due to the distance.

Feedback was also put forward about the need for:

- Consistent and accessible physicians in Fort Vermilion.
- A solution to the number of vacancies for RN positions in the Council area.
- Information to address concerns about the new air ambulance contract in the province.

Topics on the minds of our Council and community members

We were asked by the AHS Board to share the top challenges in the Council area:

- **Lack of services in the area:**
 - mental health services
 - obstetrics services in La Crete
 - dialysis
 - allied health services
- **Recruitment of healthcare professionals**
- **Review of mental health programs/services in the area**
 - A mental health program was discontinued and positions have been impossible to recruit to.
- **Recruitment incentives**
 - Provide additional living allowances to encourage recruitment in area.

A look ahead

We were pleased to see progress in two areas this year with our Council. One was the increase in the number of community members that came out to our meetings, and the second was the work that has begun by AHS to fill the mental health vacancies in the Council area.

We want to continue to connect with people in the various communities to spread awareness of our Council and to build relationships. We have plans to post information about our Council where people use health services. We find that as people get to know us, we receive more calls with input. We also want to encourage the public to attend meetings in person, share feedback, and learn about AHS programs and services. We want to continue to try to build relationships with the First Nations and Métis Settlement in our area and encourage their applications for Council membership.

We would like to attend meetings in the communities to promote awareness of the Council.

We would also like to work with AHS to address staff vacancies for addiction and mental health services, as well as provide information about addiction and mental health to the area's residents. We need to determine if an event or the distribution of information in person is more appropriate.

We want to continue to seek solutions on recruitment and retention of staff and physicians in the area.

We look forward to working with the North Zone leadership closely and partnering to develop solutions for the concerns in our communities.

Learn more

- Visit ahs.ca and search Advisory Councils
- Email truenorth@ahs.ca
- Check out our Twitter and Facebook accounts, by searching AHS Advisory Councils

Get involved

You can make a difference to the health and well-being of your family, friends, neighbours and community by sharing your thoughts and ideas with AHS. You can get involved by:

- Attending an upcoming meeting. Agendas and notices are posted on the Advisory Council webpage: ahs.ca.
- Delivering a presentation at a Council meeting on a health area of interest or concern.
- Volunteering your time as a Council member. Recruitment drives happen annually. Members are appointed for three-year terms.



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