

Alberta Doctors' Digest

Student advocacy is essential

The Alberta Medical Association is made up not only of physicians of all disciplines but residents and medical school students as well. While it is optional for medical school students to join the AMA, most students from the two Alberta Universities (Calgary and Alberta) are members. These budding physicians can become directly involved in the AMA through an elected position decided in the first year of medical school (the provincial governance representative position) or by submitting applications to sit on various committees. However, most students don't constantly engage with the AMA, and it plays a role in the background during their medical school career.

The AMA advocates for physicians on various important initiatives, such as improving primary care, retaining physicians in Alberta and improving acute care. While these health care issues seem more relevant to practicing physicians at first glance, Albertan medical students are important stakeholders. For example, during 2023 - 22 family medicine residency training positions remained unfilled (the highest number within the last decade). In contrast, BC, Manitoba and Saskatchewan had no empty seats. Therefore, there seems to be an issue relating to medical students wanting to stay in Alberta for primary care. The AMA can help address this. Current medical students can play an active role and provide opinions on important issues of this nature to help improve the state of health care.



In response to the [government tabling the 2024 budget](#) on February 29, the AMA advocated for dedicated funding for primary and acute care within the health care budget. This is in hopes of stabilizing the family medicine crisis by retaining family

physicians in Alberta and making the province an attractive option for future physicians. Social media has played an important role in helping spread this message, with the AMA Instagram making frequent posts about the urgency of the situation, including the opinions of various physicians and AMA president Paul Parks. This has allowed medical students to get involved in advocacy and present their unique opinions on the issue. This inspired me, as first-year medical student and provincial governance representative of the class of 2027 at the University of Alberta, to start the AMA Student Advocacy Committee.

This committee comprises nine diverse medical school students from the University of Alberta and Calgary. The students will be responsible for creating content for the AMA social media platforms (Instagram @albertadoctors, Twitter and Facebook). This will include graphical posts, videos of students themselves, and interview clips of physicians conducted by the students. It's the first time medical students have had the opportunity to contribute directly to the AMA's social media content. Additionally, the team will have an Instagram account specific to medical students where the committee will only post the content created for the AMA by students. You can follow this account at the handle @amamedicalstudents. This will allow for the concentration of medical student opinions onto one account.

This committee of medical students will aim to target younger generations of residents and physicians and all other physicians who use social media as a form of information conduction. This increasingly important medium needs to be rapidly adapted by the AMA to reach its changing audience. Beyond the February budget decision, this committee presents medical students' opinions on important health care crises in the Albertan health care landscape.

Beyond benefiting the AMA and its target audience, this committee aims to develop student advocacy skills. The Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada has identified a CanMEDS competency framework highlighting the necessary medical education competencies in Canada. One of these roles includes health advocacy. Physicians act as advocates for the patients and communities that they serve. Medical students need to develop these skills to become competent physicians. This committee allows medical students to engage with current health care issues and act as advocates for the community early on in their careers. The hope is that once students become involved early on in their careers, they will continue engaging with the AMA and community as they progress.

We would love it if you followed the AMA social media and student pages, if you aren't already, to see more on the opinions of the new generation of future physicians and their takes on current health care issues.

AMA Instagram: @albertadoctors

AMA Medical Student Advocacy Committee Instagram: @amamedicalstudents