

Alberta Doctors' Digest

Empowering future physicians

Health care advocacy is often seen as the domain of established professionals – politicians, health care associations, or practicing physicians. The Alberta Medical Association (AMA), for instance, is widely respected for its work on critical issues like acute care shortages, the primary care crisis, and the allocation of the 2024 provincial budget. Beyond that, the voices of medical students are just as essential. With fresh perspectives and innovative ideas, medical students can uniquely contribute to health care discussions, often sparking new approaches to longstanding challenges. As future physicians, their advocacy is vital to shaping the future of health care.

The AMA Medical Student Advocacy Committee was founded in February 2024 by Sana Samadi, a second-year medical student and AMA provincial government representative for the University of Alberta's Class of 2027. Inspired by her experiences sitting on the AMA board and encouraged by the AMA's eagerness to involve medical students, Sana recognized the need for a structured platform for student engagement in advocacy. Although the AMA was eager to include medical students, there was no established system for their involvement. This gap led to the creation of a student-led organization affiliated with the AMA, uniting medical students from the University of Calgary and the University of Alberta. The committee's mission is to raise awareness of health care topics and amplify the medical student perspective, bridging the gap between students and the broader medical community.

Historically, medical students have had limited exposure to AMA operations outside of designated university representatives. By creating more touch points, the committee fosters a deeper understanding of the AMA's role and encourages future engagement. Today's medical students, having grown up with social media, understand the influential role digital platforms and emerging tools like AI can play in advocacy, making them ideally positioned to drive these efforts forward.

Since its inception in February 2024, committee members have developed content for AMA social media platforms, producing infographics, videos featuring students, and interviews with physicians. This content is also shared on the AMA Medical Student Advocacy Committee's own social media (@amamedicalstudents), extending advocacy efforts to younger audiences, including future residents and physicians. Social media advocacy is key to creating awareness and engaging a new generation on critical health care issues. Since its inception, the committee has expanded remarkably, growing from an initial nine members to 24 new additions. This significant growth highlights the strong interest in its executive roles, with multiple applicants competing for each position. The committee's success underscores the collaborative efforts of its members in fostering connections and actively engaging with the broader health care community.

The AMA Medical Students Advocacy Committee proudly launched its new website on October 31, 2024 www.amamedicalstudents.ca, a dedicated platform designed to amplify the voices of medical students across Alberta. Inspired by the AMA's internal news features, committee president Sana Samadi envisioned a unique space where medical students could advocate for meaningful changes in health care. While initially considering support from the university department of computer science for coding,

Sana and website Chair Riya Mangukia ultimately decided to design the website themselves. This hands-on approach allowed them to create a platform tailored specifically for medical students and a public interested in their perspectives – a design truly created by medical students, for medical students (and beyond!). This student-led approach ensures that the website authentically reflects and conveys the priorities of Alberta's future physicians.

The website hosts regularly published articles supporting ongoing advocacy on key health care topics. Content includes interviews with patients, students, and physicians, along with resources for Albertans on critical issues that medical students believe are essential to medical education and the health care system. Each month, the website and social media pages focus on a particular theme relevant to medical students; in November 2024, in alignment with current political discussions (and selfishly the reproduction block for second-year students at the U of A) the focus is on women's health.

This committee is the first of its kind to bring together Alberta's two medical schools, establishing an inter-university platform for collaboration and unified advocacy – a challenging yet essential step in representing the voices of as many Albertans as possible. As the only Canadian platform where medical students have a dedicated website affiliated with a provincial body that advocates for physicians, this site empowers students to actively participate in health care discussions, enhance their visibility, share critical information, and connect meaningfully with both the medical community and the public. With this initiative, medical students can further play an active role in shaping health care policy and practice earlier in their career. This is all while developing leadership skills, participating in meaningful advocacy, and building experience that will shape their future contributions as members of the AMA and ultimately making them better more patient-centered physicians in the future.

Visit the new AMA medical student website www.amamedicalstudents.ca to explore these insights and support the next wave of health care advocacy in Alberta.