

Alberta Doctors' Digest

Patients First: Health care works best when it is shaped by the people who experience it every day

Across Alberta, patients and physicians share a common truth: health care works best when it is shaped by the people who experience it every day. That belief sits at the heart of Patients First, a growing community of Albertans committed to strengthening the province's health care system through evidence, engagement and advocacy. The initiative is owned by the AMA.

Over the past year, Patients First has grown to over 66,000 supporters spread across Alberta. It has continued to bring patient voices forward in a meaningful way, ensuring lived experience helps inform policy conversations, system planning and physician advocacy. From sharing personal stories to participating in surveys and public dialogue, this community plays a vital role in grounding health care discussions in reality.

Listening as the first step

This month, Patients First launched its annual [Patient Health Care Experience Survey](#) for the calendar year 2025, inviting Albertans to share their experiences navigating the health care system. Whether interactions were positive, frustrating or somewhere in between, each response contributes to a fuller picture of what patients are facing and where the system can improve.

The survey serves a critical purpose: it directly informs the AMA's annual *State of Health Care Report*. The 2026 report card will be published in June 2026. By pairing patient perspectives with physician insight and system data, the report provides a robust, evidence-based assessment of Alberta's health care landscape. It highlights emerging trends, identifies pressure points, and strengthens the credibility of physician advocacy by ensuring recommendations are grounded in lived experience.

Patient participation has been strong year over year, reflecting a clear appetite among Albertans to be part of the solution. Many respondents have emphasized themes that physicians know well: access challenges, continuity of care, workforce shortages, and the emotional toll that system delays can take on patients and families. These insights help move conversations beyond anecdotes and toward actionable evidence.

The survey is open until May 8. If you have an office-based practice and some wall space available, please use one of our posters – [option 1](#) or [option 2](#) – to invite anyone passing through to participate. The survey is open to everyone.

Advocacy rooted in community

Patients First is more than a survey initiative. It is a growing advocacy community that mobilizes Albertans around issues that affect health, dignity and access to care. By empowering patients to speak up through storytelling, outreach, and engagement with decision-makers, Patients First helps ensure that policy discussions reflect the real-world impact of health care decisions.

This approach complements physician advocacy by reinforcing shared priorities: strong primary care and acute care systems; equitable access to services; and supports that address the broader determinants of health. When patients and physicians are aligned, the case for meaningful change becomes harder to ignore.

Supporting Albertans who rely on AISH

One of the key advocacy priorities Patients First is advancing this year is support for Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH). For many Albertans with disabilities, AISH is not only a financial lifeline. It is closely tied to health outcomes, independence and quality of life.

Patients First is preparing to launch a campaign that highlights the lived experiences of individuals who rely on AISH and the health implications of financial insecurity. Inadequate income supports can exacerbate chronic conditions, limit access to medications and services, and increase reliance on emergency care. Changes to the AISH program are causing patient anxiety and increased administrative burden for physicians who will need to support them. By elevating patient voices, the campaign will underscore how income support policy intersects directly with health system sustainability.

This advocacy reflects a broader understanding that health care does not exist in isolation. Social supports, income stability and accessible services all play a role in keeping Albertans healthy and reducing strain on the system physicians work in every day.

A shared path forward

The strength of Patients First lies in its partnership with Alberta's physicians. By listening to patients, amplifying their voices, and translating experience into evidence, the initiative strengthens the collective call for a more responsive and resilient health care system.

As Alberta's health care challenges continue to evolve, the importance of authentic patient engagement has never been more clear. Through initiatives like the *Patient Health Care Experience Survey* and targeted advocacy campaigns, Patients First ensures that patients remain part of the conversation, not as observers, but as active contributors to change.

For physicians, this community represents a powerful ally. Together, patients and doctors can continue to advocate for a system that puts people first, supports those most in need, and delivers the care Albertans deserve.

About Patients First

Patients First is a community-led advocacy organization dedicated to improving the health care experience for all Albertans through data, dialogue and policy change. To learn more, visit www.patientsfirst.ca.

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