



## STAFF REPORT

**Title:** Letter to Minister of Health - Emergency Room Premiums

**Meeting Date:** May 24, 2022

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### **Executive Summary:**

It is the City of Cold Lake's understanding that physicians in Alberta working emergency rooms are paid a premium based on the designation and location of the hospital. Under this method, it is our understanding that hospitals are designated either as rural or urban facilities and that premiums differ depending not only by the designation, but also from community to community based on its proximity to major health care centres.

We also understand that the Cold Lake Healthcare Centre is designated as an urban healthcare facility, and thus the physicians who work at the emergency room receive a much smaller premium than others who live in similarly situated communities.

The City of Cold Lake has raised this issue before, but it did not gain any traction. There is a feeling that this system of premiums is putting Cold Lake at a disadvantage in its attempts to attract and retain physicians to the community and having locums cover shifts in the Emergency Room while be short of physicians.

Administration has prepared a letter for council's consideration to raise the issue once more with the Minister of Health. The letter seeks a meeting with the minister to discuss the payment premiums and their possible impact on the Cold Lake Health Care Centre.

### **Background:**

Physician retention and recruitment has been a long-standing priority for the City of Cold Lake. Once again, during Council's strategic priorities session on November 29 and 30, Council signed this be a corporate priority. This report is intended to be an initial briefing for City Council.

Administration reviewed reports to City Council between 2006 and 2016 relating to physician recruitment initiatives. These reports summarize that the City of Cold Lake had at time 12 physicians and 1 surgeon in Cold Lake. This statistic in the mid 2000's, while losing a doctor (due to illness) at the time created alarming issues in regards to emergency room coverage. This created the original Communities Leading Regional Recruitment and Retention Coalition (CLR3) in 2006.



In 2016, despite the significant community initiatives, tremendous investment by the region and successes in physician recruitments, the number still checked in at 12 physicians and one 1 surgeon in Cold Lake.

Between 2016 and 2020, the City was advised that AHS has increased the allocation of physicians to the City of Cold Lake by two (2). The City was pointed to the ongoing advertisements that can be found online showing that they AHS intends to have 14 physicians in Cold Lake. Again, despite the significant community initiatives, tremendous investment by the region and successes in physician recruitments, the number still checked in at 12 physicians and one 1 surgeon.

In 2021, again despite further community initiatives and the tremendous investment by the region and the City of Cold Lake, the number still checked in at 13 physicians and 2 surgeons in Cold Lake. One physician was absent indefinitely due to personal matters and the two (2) surgeons were sharing operating room resources. Again, the community could never achieve more than 12 physicians in the community, despite being advised that the allocated number for Cold Lake had increased by at least two (2) additional physicians between 2016 and 2021. In many instances, AHS pointed to the current advertisement(s) for the community and indicated that it is difficult finding physicians suitable for the community.

It should also be noted that 1 of the 2 surgeons has also since retired.

In 2022, the AHS advised that “Medical Affairs” they are seeking to fill the existing 12 positions and increase the allocation to have an additional two (2) physician positions here in Cold Lake for 2022/23 (over and above the regular 12 physicians allotted for Cold Lake) and two (2) more positions in 2023/24.

**Alternatives:**

- Council may pass a motion to authorize a letter on behalf of the City of Cold Lake to the Minister of Health requesting for more information on premiums paid to physicians in rural communities.
- Council may decline to raise the issue at this time.

**Recommended Action:**

Administration recommends that Council pass a motion to authorize a letter on behalf of the City of Cold Lake to the Minister of Health requesting that the premiums paid to physicians at the Cold Lake Health Centre be reviewed and aligned to meet the needs of the community.

**Budget Implications (Yes or No):**

No



City of *Cold Lake*

**Submitted by:**  
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