



STAFF REPORT

Title: Minister of Health - Letter to Municipal District of Bonnyville

Meeting Date: June 21, 2022

Executive Summary:

The City of Cold Lake was sent a reply from the Honourable Minister of Health, Jason Copping, to His Worship Reeve Barry Kalinski of the M.D. of Bonnyville, and carbon copied to His Worship, Mayor Craig Copeland. The letter, dated June 1, 2022, was responding to previous correspondence from the Reeve which outlined concerns regarding the availability of physicians in northeast Alberta and specifically, the shortages which are impacting service levels at the Cold Lake Healthcare Centre's Emergency Room.

The Minister states that he shares the Reeve's concern and that he is aware that the Cold Lake Healthcare Centre's Emergency room has been closed due to physician shortages. He acknowledges that there are imbalances in physician coverage around the province. He notes that the issue is not limited to Alberta and that a collaborative approach is taken to doctor recruitment and retention.

The minister also lists a number of recruitment and retention programs, including the Rural Education Supplement and Integrated Doctor Experience program, which Cold Lake is a part of.

The letter is attached for the committee's information.

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 signalled this to be a corporate priority. This report is intended to be an initial briefing for City Council.

In summary, the community has never seemed to be able to achieve more than twelve (12) physicians in the Cold Lake Healthcare Centre, 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 one (1) of the two (2) surgeons has also since retired. In 2022, the AHS advised that “Medical Affairs” they are seeking to fill the existing twelve (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 twelve (12) physicians allotted for Cold Lake) and two (2) more positions in 2023/24.

At its’ May 24, 2022 meeting, Council passed a motion authorizing a letter to the Minister of Health requesting that the premiums paid to Physicians at the Cold Lake Healthcare Centre be reviewed and aligned to meet the needs of the community. It is the City of Cold Lake’s understanding that physicians in Alberta working in emergency rooms are paid a premium based on the designation and location of the hospital. Under this method, it is Administration’s understanding that hospitals are designated either as rural or urban facilities, and that premiums differ depending not only by the designation, but also based on a hospital’s proximity to major health care centres.

Administration understands that Cold Lake has been designated as an “urban” centre despite other healthcare centres in similarly situated communities being designated as “rural” and whose physicians receive significantly larger wage premiums.

Alternatives:

- The committee may pass a motion recommending Council to prepare further correspondence to the Minister of Health and/or AHS on this matter.
- The committee may pass a motion accepting the letter as information.

Recommended Action:

Administration recommends that the Corporate Priorities Committee pass a motion accepting the letter as information.

Budget Implications (Yes or No):

No

Submitted by:

Kevin Nagoya, Chief Administrative Officer