

RHPAP



COMMITTED TO THRIVING RURAL COMMUNITIES

2025-2026 Year in Review



Financial contribution for RHPAP has been provided through the Ministry of Primary and Preventative Health Services.

RHPAP supports healthcare services throughout rural Alberta, which are provided on both historical and contemporary Indigenous lands. These lands include the territories that are home to Treaty 6, Treaty 7, and Treaty 8, as well as the Métis Nations of Alberta. These lands have long been home to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples, serving as a foundation for their communities, cultures, and traditions of stewardship and connection. We recognize Indigenous Peoples' deep history, culture, and contributions to the rural communities we serve. RHPAP is committed to fostering respectful relationships and advancing equity in healthcare, working together to build healthier, more inclusive rural communities.



RURAL ALBERTA DESERVES THE BEST

In pursuit of this commitment, we adhere to the following:

Vision

Rural Alberta communities have the appropriate health workforce to effectively deliver the health services they need to thrive.

Mission

To serve as a trusted voice, building solutions-focused partnerships and delivering initiatives that support rural communities in their efforts to keep healthcare close to home.

MESSAGE FROM THE CEO AND CHAIR



Tracy Sopkow

Chief Executive Officer

Rural Health Professions
Action Plan (RHPAP)

RHPAP continues to mark new milestones as it strengthens relationships with communities and stakeholders across Alberta to keep rural healthcare close to home.

Our investments throughout 2025-2026 reached individuals at every stage of the rural healthcare journey—from those just beginning to consider a career in healthcare to experienced professionals who have served their communities for decades.

Building interest early continues to be a vital step in developing the future rural workforce. Through Let's Go Rural! High School and Post-Secondary Events, more than 90 per cent of participants said they were interested in pursuing a rural healthcare career after taking part in RHPAP's hands-on, community-led experiences.

Students already pursuing healthcare careers responded enthusiastically to an expanded RHPAP awards program, resulting in more than 660 applications in 2025. During their education, demand for mentorship opportunities also grew significantly, with requests increasing by an incredible 193 per cent.

For those already practising, including physicians, nurses, and allied health professionals, opportunities to expand skills with continuing medical and professional development remain a priority. Through the Rural Education and Advanced Learning program alone, we supported learning opportunities across 15 health disciplines.

Community support remains integral to RHPAP's success, and we have introduced toolkits and strategic planning "Road Mapping" sessions to help our partners thrive. We worked alongside more than 600 active volunteers involved in Attraction, Integration, and Retention activities across rural and remote Alberta. These local ambassadors are dedicated to welcoming, encouraging, and supporting a range of healthcare learners and professionals serving their communities. We look forward to continuing to work on these locally driven initiatives to strengthen rural healthcare.

It has been an amazing year, marked by collaboration, commitment, and shared purpose. Together, these investments are building a stronger, more sustainable healthcare workforce to ensure rural healthcare delivers for generations to come.

Thirteen years ago, I first pulled up a seat at RHPAP's Board of Directors table, but actually my connection to the organization occurred much earlier.

I can confidently say I understand RHPAP's enormous impact firsthand because I lived it.

As a city-raised medical student nearly 30 years ago, I was introduced to RHPAP during a rural skills event in the Hinton/Jasper region. Shadowing local physicians showed me the diversity and meaningful impact of rural medicine, while the welcoming community (not to mention downhill skiing opportunities!) highlighted the balance rural practice could offer.

It became a pivotal experience in my medical training.

Throughout my journey, RHPAP continued to support me through accommodation assistance and funding opportunities such as the Physician Skills Enrichment Program, which enabled me to complete an anesthesia fellowship. Those skills allowed me to return to Pincher Creek to better serve my community.

Giving back to the organization that helped shape my career was always important. As a board member and later chair, I advocated for expanding RHPAP's mandate to strengthen healthcare for all rural Albertans. That accomplishment broadened support beyond physicians to include nurses and allied health professionals, recognizing that strong rural healthcare depends on the entire healthcare team and the continued collaboration of rural communities in promoting attraction, integration, and retention.

Although I'm stepping away from my governance role, I will continue to champion rural healthcare through RHPAP's proven Let's Go Rural! events and other initiatives that inspire current and future health professionals.

As I leave, I know RHPAP is in good hands. Its dedicated Board of Directors and innovative staff will continue to ensure quality healthcare remains easily accessible for rural Albertans.



Dr. Gavin Parker
Board Chair

Rural Health Professions
Action Plan (RHPAP)

FROM HIGH SCHOOL TO HEALTHCARE

Inspiring rural students to see their future in the health professions.



GROWING OUR OWN THROUGH EARLY EXPOSURE

RHPAP's Let's Go Rural! High School Events and *How Do I Get There?* webinars introduce rural Alberta students to the wide range of careers available in healthcare.

These events provide hands-on, experiential learning opportunities where students can explore clinical techniques, interact with health professionals, and envision themselves in health roles.

The How Do I Get There? webinars complement these experiences by offering practical guidance on education pathways, program requirements, and career planning. Together, these initiatives demystify the journey into health professions and inspire rural youth to pursue careers close to home. By engaging students early, RHPAP helps build the future rural health workforce from within the communities it serves.

“The hands-on activities (like injections, drawing blood, and suturing) were helpful to see what I liked, so I could focus my next steps on health professions that fit my interests.”

– HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT

LET'S GO RURAL! EVENT INFLUENCES STUDENT TO STUDY MEDICINE YEARS LATER



A Sundre resident is on her way to becoming a rural physician several years after a spur-of-the-moment decision to attend a medical career awareness event as a high school student.

“I know that a lot of my friends and classmates went into medical fields like nursing or emergency medical services because of the event.”



Let's Go Rural! High School Event, Slave Lake



Let's Go Rural! High School Event, Bonnyville

313

High school students (grade 9–12) **attended 10 hands-on skills events** featuring **15 unique healthcare disciplines.**

92%

Of students reported **increased interest in a medical career** after participating.

77%

Of students agree the event **increased their desire to work in rural healthcare** after post-secondary training.

140+

Students participated in four *How Do I Get There?* webinars featuring Nurse Practitioners, Dental Assistants, Respiratory Therapists and UCalgary medicine.

FROM POST-SECONDARY TO PRACTICE

Supporting future healthcare providers on their journey from education to rural careers.



BUILDING THE HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS OF TOMORROW

Accommodations

The RHPAP's Accommodations program reduces barriers for learners training in rural communities by providing safe, affordable housing during placements and rotations. These experiences are strongly linked to future rural recruitment and retention.

Let's Go Rural! Post-Secondary Events

Let's Go Rural! Events connect post-secondary health students with rural communities through immersive experiences. These events showcase the breadth of rural practice, lifestyle, and career opportunities while fostering meaningful connections with local health professionals and community members.

Rural Mentorship Program

The Rural Mentorship Program pairs first- and second-year medical students with experienced rural physicians across Alberta, offering hands-on opportunities to observe clinical care, develop core medical skills, and actively participate in basic procedures within real-world rural practice settings. This early exposure fosters interest in rural medicine and strengthens the pipeline of future rural healthcare providers.

"I had no experience in rural medicine prior to these RHPAP shifts and I am absolutely interested in practicing rural medicine post-graduation."

– MENTORSHIP STUDENT



A MED STUDENT'S AMAZING RURAL EXPERIENCE IN FAIRVIEW

For the first time ever, students from the new U of A Northern Alberta Medical Program (NAMP) attended an RHPAP Let's Go Rural Post-Secondary Event.

955

Rotations supported in
166 rural accommodations
in **51 communities**
(748 medical, 96 electives,
55 nursing, 56 allied health)



Let's Go Rural! Post-Secondary Event, Olds

107

Learners attended **four**
Let's Go Rural! weekends

19

Post-secondary events,
webinars, and seminars



Rural Mentorship Program

654

Rural Mentorship Shifts
offered, a **282% increase** over
two years.

70

Active preceptors,
representing an **89% increase**

660

Rural Healthcare Student
Award applications received

INVEST IN HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

Championing lifelong learning and continuing professional development.



RURAL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

The RHPAP rural professional development programs are an essential tool in supporting rural workforce sustainability, education access, and service quality improvement. By supporting continuous learning, addressing regional training disparities, and reinforcing provider confidence and retention, these programs help sustain and elevate rural healthcare across Alberta.

Continuing Medical and Professional Development (Physician Skills, REF, REAL and GEMS)

The Continuing Medical Education (CME) and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programs support rural health professionals in maintaining excellence across their careers. Through accessible, relevant, and community-informed learning opportunities, these programs help practitioners stay current with evolving clinical practices, technologies, and rural health priorities. By reducing barriers to ongoing education, RHPAP strengthens professional confidence, competence, and retention in rural communities. The programs also foster collaboration, peer connection, and shared learning across disciplines. Together, CME and CPD initiatives play a vital role in sustaining a skilled, resilient, and high-quality rural health workforce.

Rural Physician Locum Services

The Weekend Locum Program and Seniors Weekend Program are key rural retention strategies that reduce provider burnout, improve work-life balance, and demonstrate meaningful system support. By offering scheduled relief, these programs enhance community stability and make rural practice more sustainable and appealing to both current providers and prospective recruits.

BIEN

Launched in April 2023, the **Bursary for Internationally Educated Nurses (BIEN)** is a targeted workforce initiative administered by RHPAP and funded by Advanced Education. The program supports internationally educated nurses in completing bridging programs to practice as Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs) or Registered Nurses (RNs) in Alberta. In exchange, recipients commit to a Return of Service in a rural community, directly contributing to rural healthcare capacity and workforce sustainability.

108

Months of return-of-service commitments secured through Physician Skills Enrichment Grant and 32 physicians trained

146

REAL program trainees supported across 15 healthcare disciplines, representing a 38% increase in trainees

1,012

Rural Education Fund trainees across **12 disciplines** supported, a 38% increase



STARS Education Day funded by Rural Education Fund

1,806

Years of return-of-service commitments across 4 BIEN cycles

47

BIEN recipients currently working in rural communities

867

Weekend locum requests filled across Alberta (238 Weekend Locum and 629 Seniors' Weekend Locum)

CREATE COMMUNITY CAPACITY

Building strong, sustainable partnerships.



PARTNERING TO ENHANCE RURAL HEALTHCARE

Attraction, Integration, and Retention (AIR) initiatives play a vital role in empowering rural communities to lead sustainable, locally driven workforce strategies. Through collaboration with AIR committees, grassroots committees embedded in rural communities, RHPAP supports long-term workforce resilience with practical, community-centered solutions. Resources such as the AIR Toolkit, tailored coaching, and strategic workshops enable communities to plan, implement, and sustain effective attraction, integration and retention efforts. These supports help communities proactively address local health care challenges and strengthen rural health systems for the future.

Attraction, Integration and Retention (AIR)

61

Active AIR committees

173

Communities represented

619

Active volunteers

1

New modular, interactive AIR Toolkit

400+

People attended 8 interactive learning webinars to understand more about rural healthcare

6

“Road Mapping” strategic planning sessions and Regional Summits with committees, helping regional stakeholders align their attraction and retention work

14

Provincial taskforces, committees, and working groups with RHPAP representation

20

AIR grants approved, supporting the work of the following rural communities:

- | | | | |
|----------------|----------------|----------------|--------------|
| • Bassano | • Hinton | • Peace River | • Tofield |
| • Claresholm | • Lac La Biche | • Slave Lake | • Two Hills |
| • Edson | • Lamont | • Smoky Lake | • Vegreville |
| • Grande Cache | • Manning | • Smoky River | • Whitecourt |
| • High Prairie | • Milk River | • Spirit River | • Worsley |

DEMONSTRATE IMPACT

Celebrating leadership, service, and lasting impact.



HONOURING THOSE MAKING A LASTING DIFFERENCE IN RURAL ALBERTA

Rhapsody Awards

13 nominees celebrated with Rhapsody Awards nominations representing the following communities:

- Barrhead
- Bonnyville
- Edson
- Lac La Biche
- Milk River
- Oyen
- Ponoka
- Spirit River
- Sundre
- Taber
- Viking
- Westlock

Dr. Cecile Lavoie received the 2025 RhPAP Rhapsody Physician Award in recognition of nearly four decades of exceptional service to the Bonnyville community. A dedicated clinician, mentor, and leader, her lasting contributions have strengthened rural healthcare through innovation, patient-centred care, and a lifelong commitment to supporting future generations of rural physicians.

Chantal Crawford received the 2025 RhPAP Rhapsody Healthcare Heroes Award for her outstanding leadership as a registered nurse and site manager in Sundre. Through her commitment to education, innovation, and team development, she has advanced rural healthcare while creating new opportunities for health professionals to learn, grow, and deliver exceptional care close to home.

Alberta Rural Health Week celebrates the people bringing care closer to home

Alberta Rural Health Week 2025 celebrated the people, partnerships, and communities that make quality healthcare possible across rural Alberta. Through community events, social media engagement, and province-wide recognition, the week raised awareness of the importance of rural healthcare while honouring the dedication of the health professionals, volunteers, and community leaders who help keep care close to home.



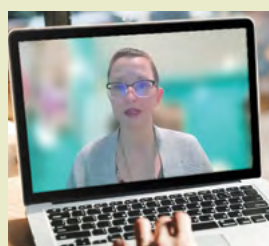
Heidi Overguard, RHPAP Committee member(right) presents 2025 Rhapsody Healthcare Heroes Award to Chantal Crawford, Sundre, AB



Tracy Sopkow, RHPAP CEO (left) presents 2025 Rhapsody Physician Award to Dr. Cecile Lavoie, Bonnyville, AB



Alberta Rural Health Week, Vegreville, AB



8

Knowledge Now webinars connected over **400 Albertans** to expert, practical learning that supports rural care

99%

Of attendees indicated they would **recommend a session to peers**

18

Communities held celebration events and activities during **Alberta Rural Health Week**

BOARD UPDATE

DR. GAVIN PARKER TO LEAVE RHPAP ROLE AFTER DECADES OF INVOLVEMENT

“We need to convert some city kids ... that must be a big part of our strategy. That must be part of our plan: How do we take kids like me ... and show them what kind of fun a rural career this is?”

– DR. GAVIN PARKER



Amber Link presents Dr. Gavin Parker with painting of Pincher Creek.

A turning point came during his second year of medical school when he attended an RHPAP student information event in Hinton and Jasper. While the promise of free skiing caught his attention, it was something else that left a lasting impression.

“Honestly, it was how happy the rural physicians were,” says Dr. Parker in recalling the influence the event had on his future.

“RHPAP events tend to be very well organized. We were well fed, well cared for, felt valued and they hooked you in,” Dr. Parker recalls. “It wasn’t a bad move on RHPAP’s part.”

As a medical learner, he stayed in RHPAP accommodations during clerkships and rotations across Alberta, where he met influential rural physicians who helped shape his career path. In 2006, he established his practice in Pincher Creek and later received funding for an anesthesia fellowship, including training through RHPAP’s Physician Skills Enrichment Program.

Recognizing the impact RHPAP had on his own journey, Dr. Parker eventually joined the board.

“I know what difference it made for me and that was always my goal to try to find those students who are at a susceptible stage of their decision making.

“That was probably the overwhelming reason why I wanted to serve on the board. I felt that RHPAP had provided me so many advantages.”

Throughout his time on the board, Dr. Parker brought both personal experience and enthusiasm to the organization. His leadership extended beyond RHPAP as he became a clinical educator and later served as president of the Society of Rural Physicians of Canada.

Although he is stepping away from board leadership, Dr. Parker says his commitment to rural recruitment remains unchanged.

“I’ll always take shadow students from RHPAP and do Let’s Go Rural! High School Events. I’m always happy to volunteer for that.”

BOARD OF DIRECTORS



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Association



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Public Member



Ashley Woytuik
Public Member

MAKING AN IMPACT

SMILE RETURNS FOR RURAL TRAUMA PATIENT



Discover how an RHPAP Physician Skills Enrichment Grant helped bring life-changing trauma therapy to rural Alberta, transforming one patient's recovery and expanding access to specialized mental health care.

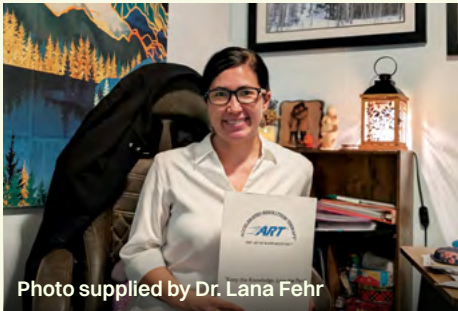


Photo supplied by Dr. Lana Fehr

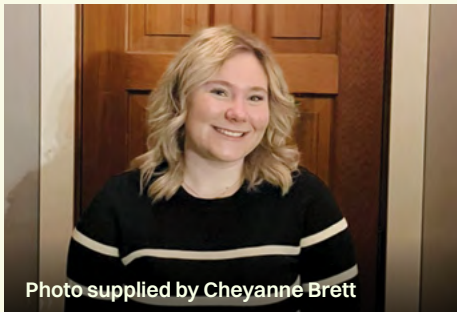


Photo supplied by Cheyenne Brett



LET'S GO RURAL! EVENT INFLUENCES HEALTHCARE AIDE CAREER

See how an RHPAP Let's Go Rural! Event inspired one student's journey into healthcare, highlighting the lasting impact of early rural career exposure.

RETURN TO NURSING MADE POSSIBLE THROUGH BIEN PROGRAM



Read how RHPAP's BIEN program helped an internationally educated nurse overcome financial barriers and return to practice, strengthening healthcare in a rural Alberta community.



Photo supplied by Rialyne Dalida



Let's Go Rural!, Taber, AB



RESIDENT PHYSICIANS EAGER TO GIVE BACK TO PROMOTE RURAL

Learn how resident physicians are paying forward their rural training experiences by mentoring future learners and advocating for careers in rural medicine.

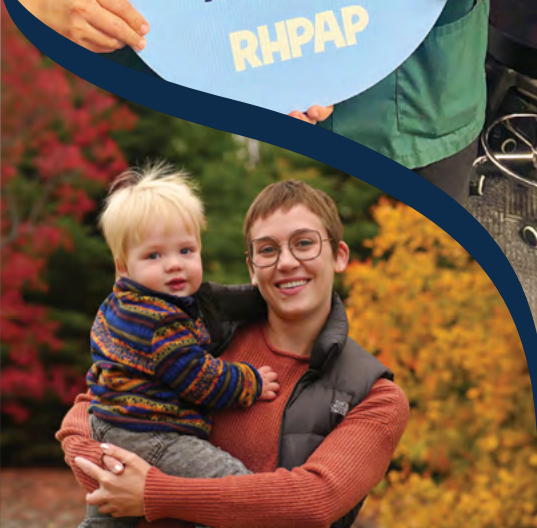
RHPAP'S MIDWIFE SUPPORT HELPS RURAL MOMS-TO-BE



Find out how RHPAP's support for continuing education is helping rural midwives enhance maternity care and improve outcomes for families across Alberta.



Photo supplied by Hannah Longson



RHPAP

CHAMPIONING RURAL HEALTHCARE

RHPAP.CA

