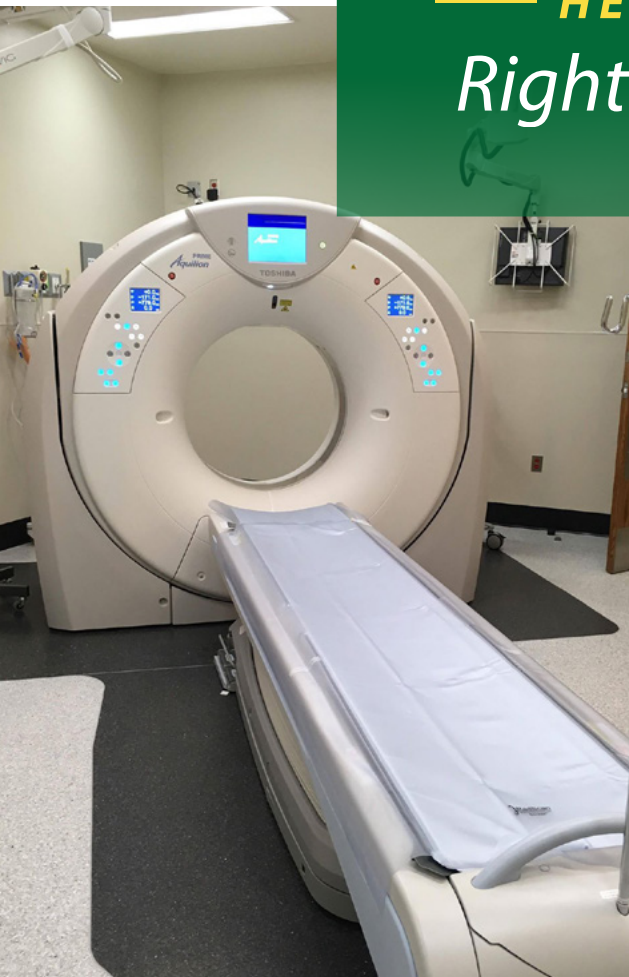




***Patients First***  
— HEALTH CARE PLAN —  
*Right Care. Right Time.*



# Message from the Premier

Patients are at the heart of health care; they are the reason Saskatchewan's dedicated health care professionals show up every day to deliver exceptional care in what are most often very difficult circumstances. Although investments in health care continue to grow, our system is still experiencing pressure, with rising demand, busy hospitals, and ongoing challenges in connecting people with primary care providers.

Saskatchewan is not alone in this; we know that every province in Canada is struggling to meet the needs of patients. The challenges are real, but solutions are possible through innovative approaches that drive short-term progress and lasting change.

Access to care is non-negotiable, which means standing still is simply not an option. Saskatchewan patients, families, community partners and health care professionals have told us they want new approaches, expanded services, and the right type of care in the right place and at the right time.

The **Health Human Resources Action Plan** laid the foundation for this work, and the steps taken to date have delivered measurable progress across the health care system. The **Patients First Health Care Plan** is not a declaration that challenges have been solved — it is a commitment to accelerate the pace of change, improvement and innovation.

This plan builds on the commitments we made in the 2024 Throne Speech: **ensuring every resident has access to a primary care provider and ensuring timely access to surgery**. These commitments to access are straightforward yet significant, and they are driving transformation across Saskatchewan's health care system. We will accelerate what's working, continue to address what isn't, and continue building a future where patients are at the heart of every decision we make.



Scott Moe  
Premier of Saskatchewan



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“

Standing still is  
not an option.

Our commitment  
is to put patients  
first and improve  
outcomes for you.

– Premier Scott Moe

”

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# Message from the Ministers of Health

Sooner or later, every Saskatchewan resident relies on our health care system for quality care.

Over the past several years, we have had the opportunity to visit health care facilities across the province, and we have met the dedicated professionals who provide that care. More importantly, we have heard from patients and families across Saskatchewan who have received – or are currently receiving – care within our system.

What we hear most clearly is this: we must always put patients first. There are many priorities and challenges in health care, but above everything else, patients – our friends, our family members, our neighbours – must remain the focus of every decision we make.

Saskatchewan has made significant investments in recent years to expand services, strengthen our health care workforce, and improve how the system operates. But we must also take a clear-eyed look at how the system is working today. We need to reinforce what is working, fix what is not, and modernize care so it better meets patients where they are.

The Patients First Health Care Plan is about ensuring that people receive the right care, at the right time, in the right place.

Our government has focused on two key priorities: improving access to primary care and ensuring patients can receive surgical care in a timely manner. The Patients First Health Care Plan builds on progress already made in both areas, strengthening our efforts to connect every resident to a primary care provider, and to ensure necessary surgeries happen as quickly – and as close to home – as possible.

The approaches in this plan make a real difference for Saskatchewan people, whether they reside in our urban centres or our rural and remote communities. When more services are available close to home families spend less time on the road, and more time with their loved ones. By expanding team-based models, we are ensuring that health care across our province continues to be steady and dependable, meaning that more people will be able to access the high-quality care they expect, in the communities they trust.

Improving health care will require honest assessment, collaboration, and changes that may feel uncomfortable at first. But the more time we spend listening to patients, to health care workers, and to leaders across the system, the more certain we are that putting patients first is the right path forward.

Because at the end of the day, patients are the reason our health care system exists.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jeremy Cockrill'.

Jeremy Cockrill  
Minister of Health

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Lori Carr'.

Lori Carr  
Minister of Mental Health and Addictions,  
Seniors and Rural and Remote Health

# Patients First

— HEALTH CARE PLAN —

*Improving Access*

## Executive Summary

### Patients First

Health care isn't just a system — it's people who need care and those who provide it. Across Canada, we are seeing the same headlines: crowded hospitals, long waits for surgery, staffing shortages and services under pressure.

Nearly 20 per cent of Canadians do not have a regular care provider. Emergency rooms are stretched, health care professionals carry heavy workloads, and despite major investments in the system, many people still feel they are not getting the care they need when they need it.

At the same time, the practice of medicine is evolving. New technologies, virtual care tools and innovative care models are creating opportunities to deliver care in ways that were simply not possible even a decade ago. The path forward is clear: reinforce what is working, fix what is not and modernize care so it meets patients where they are.

Saskatchewan is transforming health care by **putting patients first**, expanding access, strengthening teams, modernizing facilities and technology, and removing barriers so providers can practice to the full extent of their training.

These are tangible, province-wide improvements that are working to stabilize emergency rooms, accelerate diagnostics and surgeries, and deliver more consistent, relationship-based primary care. These are not only promises on paper; they are real changes underway today, from new primary care doors opening in our communities to faster diagnostics and surgeries and safer, more modern care environments for patients and staff.

In the last year, we launched the largest publicly funded nurse practitioner-led primary care expansion in our history, 23 new nurse practitioner contracts signed in just six months, with capacity to treat more than 18,000 patients. That means more families attached to a provider, less pressure on emergency rooms and care that's consistent and close to home.

We are growing the workforce by recruiting and retaining more nurses, physicians, specialists and allied professionals, expanding training seats and rural pathways, and introducing physician assistants to strengthen team-based care. We are also modernizing scope of practice by empowering nurse practitioners, pharmacists, paramedics and others to do what they're trained to do, because when every professional can contribute at the highest level, patients get faster assessments and better co-ordinated care.

We have added acute care and ICU capacity, upgraded imaging, and invested in innovative surgeries such as robot-assisted procedures, so people get answers and treatment sooner. These steps are reducing bottlenecks and helping patients receive quality care faster.

We are expanding access and innovation through urgent care centres, virtual care and better patient navigation so people can find the **right door the first time** and get help without unnecessary emergency room visits. We are also investing in safer facilities and workplace supports, because care works best when patients and providers are safe and supported.

We continue to make progress while listening to what patients, providers, and communities are telling us: put patients first by improving access. That is precisely why Saskatchewan is investing in people and capital, expanding urgent and primary care, modernizing scope of practice and staffing models, and advancing virtual care, navigation and diagnostic innovation.

We know that mental health and addictions issues continue to be a concern for many Saskatchewan families. Addressing these issues remains a key priority for the Government of Saskatchewan. We are committed to aggressively targeting these challenges through focused actions outlined in the dedicated and comprehensive **Action Plan for Mental Health and Addictions**.

We know these are uncertain geopolitical and economic times. Budgets are tight, pressures are real, and needs are growing. **But our commitment is firm and clear:**

We will keep **investing in people and facilities, keep improving policies and practice, and keep measuring what matters:** access to care providers and access to timely surgery.

Because for Saskatchewan families, timely, safe and close-to-home care isn't negotiable. It's essential.

- **Investment that endures:** We will continue adding beds, ICU capacity and modern diagnostics, expanding surgical capacity, and building the facilities and long-term care spaces our communities need.
- **Policies that unlock capacity:** We will modernize scope-of-practice and staffing models, streamline recruitment and advance EMS and laboratory technology to speed up results and reduce barriers to care.
- **Transparency that builds trust:** We will set clear targets and keep listening to patients, providers and communities so we can keep improving what matters most.

We are protecting Saskatchewan's health care steadily, tangibly and together. We will stay the course, accelerate what works and keep improving outcomes:

**the right care,  
in the right place,  
at the right time,**

for everyone who calls this province home.



# Patients First Health Care Plan - Table of Contents

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# Patients First Health Care Plan:

## Introduction

Canada is experiencing pressures in delivering timely and reliable primary health care. According to the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI), nearly 20 per cent of Canadians lack a regular health care provider, such as a family doctor or nurse practitioner. There is a shrinking number of family physicians providing full-time primary care, a nationally experienced declining interest among new graduates in choosing family medicine, finite training capacity and ongoing competition for health care workers which are all contributing to a widening gap between what patients need and the system's ability to provide it.

Saskatchewan's population has grown by nearly 28 per cent between 2006 and 2026. The province's population is also aging. From 2016 to 2021, the number of residents aged 65 and over increased by 18.3 per cent. The proportion of adults managing at least one chronic condition has risen from 41 per cent to 46 per cent over the past eight years. As the population grows, lives longer and faces more complex health needs, the demand for timely, dependable primary care becomes even greater.

In 2022, the Saskatchewan Government introduced the **Health Human Resources (HHR) Action Plan** to recruit, train, incentivize, and retain health care professionals. The plan identified high-priority professions for recruitment, expanded health care training seats, incentivized recruitment for hard-to-fill positions, expanded the scope of practice for some professions, and helped staffing in rural and northern communities.

Saskatchewan has invested more than \$460 million into boosting the health care workforce since 2022, focusing on recruiting, training, supporting and retaining professionals in the province. **Over 7,500 nurses and other health care professionals have already joined the system.**



**“Recent labour market highlights in this (health care) sector include strong recruitment results from the province’s HHR Action Plan.”**

- Jobbank.gc.ca

According to the Canadian Institute for Health Information, Saskatchewan's recent investments are making a difference. Saskatchewan has one of the strongest health care workforces in Canada, with staffing levels that surpass the national average. We are committed to building on this progress, and every action in this plan is designed to address the challenges we continue to hear from Saskatchewan families.

The *Patients First Health Care Plan* builds on recent progress and accelerates the changes needed to ensure Saskatchewan people receive the care they expect and deserve.

## What We Have Heard

Across Saskatchewan, patients have been clear about the pressures they are experiencing in the health care system. Many say they are waiting too long to see a doctor, and that getting help with common illnesses, urgent concerns, surgeries and diagnostics can feel difficult and slow. Concerns from patients include delays in elective surgeries, CT and MRI scans, as well as pressure on emergency rooms and hospitals operating at or near capacity. Families have also described challenges when long-term care options are unavailable close to home.

Health care providers and administrators have echoed these concerns. They cite recruitment challenges across the province, especially in rural and northern areas, as staffing shortages can lead to service disruptions. Communication gaps between primary care, specialists and hospitals can fragment care. Outdated rules and scope limitations can prevent professionals from



working to their full scope of training. There have also been calls to expand training capacity, with hundreds of Saskatchewan students competing for limited medical school seats, and to strengthen safety in facilities where incidents of violence are occurring.

Despite these challenges, there is strong support for the recent initiatives that have been implemented and have proven to work well. Nurse practitioners are improving access to primary care. Pharmacists are treating more common ailments. Urgent care centres are providing additional options for patients and reducing pressure on emergency rooms. The Virtual Physician Program is providing a team-based approach to rural doctors and helping to avoid rural emergency room disruptions. Point-of-care testing enables trained health care staff to conduct a range of diagnostics that deliver results to providers in under 30 minutes, making care faster and more convenient. The feedback shows a system under pressure but also one with significant opportunities for meaningful, patient first improvements.

There is strong support for solutions that are already working. Nurse practitioners are improving access to primary care. Pharmacists are treating common ailments. Urgent care centres are reducing emergency room visits. Point-of-care testing is making care faster and more convenient.

# Patients First Health Care Plan:

## Expanding Access to Care

**Within the HHR Action Plan and the 2024 Throne Speech, the Saskatchewan government made a commitment to open more doors for patients to access primary care.** A key component is expanding the role of nurse practitioners in delivering frontline primary care to residents across the province.

**Nurse practitioners have long been trusted members of our health care system.** They have skill sets complementary to our family physicians, and advanced training with the authority to assess, diagnose, treat, prescribe and refer. Nurse practitioners ensure patients receive high-quality primary care quickly and close to home.

As we work to increase training capacity and recruitment and retention of family physicians, nurse practitioners bridge gaps in patient access and support our target of attaching Saskatchewan residents to primary care providers who can manage both routine and complex health needs.

This is why we launched the largest publicly funded nurse practitioner-led primary-care expansion in Saskatchewan's history. It has created new access to publicly funded primary care in communities that have experienced

challenges, with strong early uptake from both providers and patients. Access to care is improving with these new provincial nurse practitioner primary care contracts but we have heard from patients that they also need improved access to timely diagnostics and surgery.

Every day, thousands of patients rely on Saskatchewan's health care system, which delivers a high volume of MRIs, CT scans, X-rays, and surgeries through the work of more than 50,000 health professionals. Like other provinces, Saskatchewan is facing increasing demand for procedures and diagnostics, including surgery, due to an increasing and aging population alongside high levels of chronic diseases and other health conditions.

The province's targeted investments are making measurable improvements. Saskatchewan has expanded acute care and ICU capacity, strengthened diagnostic services with new imaging technology and mobile units, and increased surgical capacity through innovations such as robot-assisted surgery and partnerships with a private surgical centre performing publicly funded procedures. These investments are helping reduce backlogs, accelerate diagnosis, improve patient outcomes and bring specialized care closer to home.





# What We Have Done



## Nurse Practitioner Expansion

- ✓ **New nurse practitioner funding model introduced**, allowing nurse practitioners to deliver publicly funded primary care through independent contracts, an approach not previously available at scale.
- ✓ **Increased contract pilot from 6 to 30 nurse practitioner contracts** due to an overwhelmingly positive response.
- ✓ **23 new nurse practitioner contracts signed within the first six months**, serving communities across Saskatchewan, from Prince Albert to Carnduff and Wilkie to Arcola.
- ✓ **Target of 800 patients per nurse practitioner within two years**, giving more than **18,000 people access** to a dedicated primary care provider, including many without previous attachment.
- ✓ **Improved access to timely, relationship-based care**, reducing reliance on emergency rooms and supporting patients with routine and complex needs.



## Team-Based and Collaborative Care Expansion

- ✓ **Ten new team-based primary care teams** are under development with five already operating, improving coordinated, multi-provider support, especially in rural and under-served areas like Kamsack, Wadena and Esterhazy.
- ✓ **28 physician-led clinics** funded to operate under collaborative, team-based models through a new **\$10 million annual Physician Innovation Fund**.



## Increasing Hospital & ICU Capacity

- ✓ Since 2021 we have opened and staffed 201 acute care beds across the province. This includes:
  - 155 acute care beds across **Saskatoon Hospitals**, 69 of these are under construction or being staffed
  - 44 acute care beds in **Regina Hospitals**, one critical care bed added to each **Yorkton Regional Health Centre** and **Prince Albert Victoria Hospital**
- ✓ Expanded ICU capacity with four beds at St. Paul's Hospital to better support critically ill and surgical patients.



## Increasing Diagnostics Capacity

- ✓ Increased annual capacity by **55,000+ CT scans and 15,000 MRI scans** since 2020-21 (approximately 205,000 scans performed per year).
- ✓ Expanded PET/CT capacity by **1,300 patients annually**.
- ✓ Launched a **mobile MRI unit** in Regina and **portable pediatric MRI** at Jim Pattison Children's Hospital.
- ✓ Opened a new **Regina Breast Health Centre** in 2025 — by the end of the year the centre had received 1,400 referrals.
- ✓ Screening mammograms increased nearly **30 per cent** since 2020-21.
- ✓ Lowered breast cancer screening age, giving **76,000 more women** access by 2026.



## Increasing Surgeries

- ✓ Established a **robot-assisted surgery program** with four systems operating in Saskatoon and Regina.
- ✓ Performed **438 robot-assisted surgeries in Saskatoon** and **58 in Regina** in the past year.
- ✓ Private surgical partners completed approximately **17,000 publicly funded surgeries**, accounting for 18 per cent of provincial procedures annually.
- ✓ Saskatchewan performed **100,000+ surgeries last year**, a 30 per cent increase since 2020.
- ✓ **20+ new anesthesiologists** added to expand surgical capacity.
- ✓ Became the first western province to offer **Interventional Tricuspid Valve Repair** (a cardiac procedure) reducing the need for out-of-province travel.



## Increasing EMS Capacity

- ✓ 107 ambulance services operating in 109 communities, providing province-wide emergency coverage.
- ✓ Since 2022-23, the government has expanded the emergency response workforce by 200 full time equivalent positions in 68 communities to stabilize and support services in rural and northern communities.
- ✓ Invested in modernized technology, such as new computer-aided dispatch systems, and enhanced 911 intake to allow nurses to triage calls and refer low acuity patients to more appropriate community-based care, reducing demand on emergency rooms.



## Next Steps

1. **Expand Nurse Practitioner-Led Access Province-Wide**  
No limit to the number of contracts for nurse practitioners interested in delivering publicly funded primary care.
2. **Build Fully Functioning Nurse Practitioner-Led Primary Care Teams**  
Pilot team-based models that allow nurse practitioners to hire registered nurses, licensed practical nurses, dietitians, occupational therapists, and other allied health staff.
3. **Train More Nurse Practitioners Annually**  
Grow the NP pipeline by adding **26 more training seats** in Saskatchewan - increasing training capacity by 45 per cent.
  - 13 seats at the University of Saskatchewan
  - 13 seats at the combined University of Regina-Saskatchewan Polytechnic program

NP Training Seats	Current	Target New	Total NP Training Seats
U of S	22	13	35
U of R/SaskPoly	35	13	48
<b>Total NP Training Seats</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>83</b>

4. **Strengthen Emergency Room and Urgent Care Capacity**  
Increase nurse practitioner positions in emergency rooms and urgent care centres to reduce wait times and improve patient flow.
5. **Support Registered Nurse Career Progression**  
Incentivize registered nurses to pursue nurse practitioner education to expand the future workforce
  - Government will provide \$78,000 over two years for registered nurses to pursue their nurse practitioner training with a return for service contract.
6. **Improve Care for Seniors**  
Give nurse practitioners the same opportunities as physicians to provide care for long-term care residents, supporting timely and consistent care for seniors.
7. **Hospital Care & ICU Expansion**
  - Complete renovations and staffing for **69 more beds** at Saskatoon City Hospital.
  - Staff and open **24 more acute care beds and four ICU beds** at St. Paul's Hospital.
  - Staff and open **six pediatric beds** at Jim Pattison Children's Hospital.
  - Staff and open **36 acute care beds** at Royal University Hospital.
  - Expand ICU capacity by **seven beds** at Royal University Hospital.
  - Staff and open **three additional NICU beds** at Regina General Hospital.
  - Complete construction on the Prince Albert Victoria Hospital **adding 57 acute care beds** to the community.

# Next Steps

## 8. Modernizing Diagnostics

- Modernize laboratory medicine using new technologies to shorten turnaround times while increasing the number of lab tests that can be performed in the province.
- Continue expanding MRI, CT and PET-CT capacity through further volume increases.
- Add new capacity through expansion such as the Estevan MRI.
- Work towards 2028 target; **90 per cent of patients receive diagnostic scans within 60 days.**

## 9. Improve Access to Surgery

- Perform **450,000 surgeries over four years and reduce wait times to a 90-day target.**
- Expand the scope of publicly funded surgeries that can be performed through provincial partnerships with private surgical providers.
- Intensify recruitment for anesthesia professionals to increase surgical volumes.
- Launch an improved online surgical specialist directory.
- Expand pathways that focus on early treatment and stabilization to give patients more care options and reduce the need for surgery.
- Expand pooled referral systems province-wide to reduce wait times and improve co-ordination, increase efficiencies through centralized surgical scheduling, and better prepare patients for their surgical experience.

## 10. EMS System Improvements

- Additional investment to strengthen emergency response capacity, continued bursaries, and mental health supports.





# Why This Matters: Outcomes

## **Better Access and Faster Care**

- More qualified providers delivering care means shorter waits for appointments, assessments and follow-up.
- Patients spend less time searching for care and more time receiving it.

## **Complements Expansion and Investments in Family Physicians**

- Uses our full spectrum of health professionals to deliver primary care across the province.

## **Stronger Access in Rural and Northern Communities**

- Services are available closer to home with less travel for routine or urgent care.

## **Faster Access to Hospital Care**

- More acute care beds reduce admission delays and improve patient flow.

## **Expanded Surgical Capacity**

- Robot-assisted surgery, community partnerships and specialist recruitment decrease backlogs and accelerate recovery times.

## **Better Support for Critically Ill Patients**

- Expanded ICU capacity ensures timely, life-saving care.

## **Shorter Diagnostic Wait Times**

- Modern imaging and laboratory upgrades speed clinical decisions and enable earlier treatment.

## **Specialized Care Close to Home**

- New cardiac procedures and advanced imaging reduce the need for out-of-province travel.

## **Expanded Care for Seniors**

- Delivered by nurse practitioners with enhanced roles in long term care.

## **Better Support for People with Chronic and Complex Needs**

- Provided through coordinated, team-based care.

## **Reduced Emergency Room Pressure**

- With more professionals providing primary and urgent care, patients get the right care earlier, helping to stabilize emergency rooms.
- More inpatient beds and care co-ordination reduce emergency room congestion and improve patient flow.

## **More Consistent, Relationship-Based Care**

- Helping families receive ongoing support from a dedicated provider.

## **A More Adaptable, Patient-Focused Primary Care System**

- Patients have more options and access points.

## **More Coordinated and Continuous Care**

- Team-based and relationship focused models strengthen continuity, improve patient flow and enhance long term health outcomes.

## **Long-Term Workforce Sustainability**

- Driven by expanded training, improved career pathways and reduced reliance on temporary staffing.

## **Reliable Emergency Response**

- A strong paramedic workforce ensures timely care across the province.

Saskatchewan is expanding access to primary care by increasing the role of nurse practitioners and supporting flexible models that deliver timely, relationship-based care close to home.

## Momentum is building as the province expands nurse practitioner-led care, grows health care teams and continues investing in family physician-led primary care.

This approach opens more access points across the province and strengthens the system, giving patients timely care close to home and providers the support they need.

Saskatchewan is strengthening access to surgical care by expanding operating room capacity and improving coordination across the provincial health care system. By increasing surgical volumes, modernizing referral pathways and strengthening partnerships with community providers, the province aims to deliver timely procedures while maintaining high standards of quality and safety. Centralized surgical scheduling, expanded pooled referral systems and improved patient preparation programs will help reduce wait times and ensure operating rooms are used efficiently.

At the same time, Saskatchewan is modernizing diagnostic services. Investments in advanced imaging equipment, expanded laboratory capacity and digital diagnostic systems will help shorten wait times and improve coordination between providers. Increasing access to MRI, CT and PET-CT scans will support earlier diagnosis, better treatment planning and improved health outcomes for patients across the province.




## Patients First Health Care Plan: Improving Recruitment, Retention and Training

Across Canada, provinces are facing significant challenges in recruiting and retaining health care workers. Saskatchewan, however, is seeing real progress by keeping patients at the centre of every decision and investing in recruitment, training and long-term workforce stability.

Through the work of the Saskatchewan Healthcare Recruitment Agency, the Saskatchewan Health Authority, and record training expansions, thousands of new nurses, physicians, specialists and technical professionals are providing care to patients. More graduates are staying, more providers are choosing Saskatchewan, and new roles, such as physician assistants, are strengthening care teams across the province.

At the same time, Saskatchewan is building the next generation of talent with hundreds of new training seats, new health-science programs, expanded residency opportunities and rural training pathways that now stretch from Yorkton to Melfort to La Ronge. Services in rural and northern communities are stabilizing, team-based care is growing, and more people are receiving timely care closer to home. Saskatchewan is building a health care workforce that will improve access to care and put patients first.

Now, Saskatchewan will build on this momentum by continuing to recruit, train and support the professionals who make patient first care possible and to ensure families across the province can count on strong, reliable care today and into the future.



Since April 1, 2024, we have successfully recruited a total of 32 pediatric providers to the province. This includes 11 general pediatricians and 21 pediatric subspecialists. There are an additional 11 providers who have made commitments and are expected to start practise within the year.



# What We Have Done



## Recruitment

- ✓ **2,710 nursing graduates hired** (in-province and out-of-province) since April 2023.
- ✓ **Net gain of 2,846 registered nurses** since 2020.
- ✓ **Net gain of 520 physicians** since 2020, including:
  - **223** family physicians
  - **297** more licensed specialists (148 specialists added in the 2024-25 year alone)
- ✓ **306 out-of-province specialists and hard-to-recruit health care professionals hired**, including medical technicians, sonographers, physiotherapists, respiratory therapists, perfusionists and others.
- ✓ **First-ever physician assistant roles created**, strengthening team-based care.
  - **Physician assistants are now practicing** in family medicine, pediatric cardiology, emergency and surgery.
- ✓ **400+ health care professionals recruited** from the Philippines
- ✓ **Paramedic workforce above national and western per-capita averages.**
- ✓ **194 new full-time equivalent long term care positions** added since 2021-22.



## Retention

- ✓ **859 students supported** through the Final Clinical Placement Bursary.
  - Final clinical placements provide supervised, hands-on training in clinical settings and are typically unpaid.
  - A one-time \$2000 Final Clinical Bursary supports students in exchange for a one-year return-of-service in rural or northern Saskatchewan.
- ✓ **516 health-care professionals hired** through the Rural & Remote Recruitment Incentive.
- ✓ **392 new and enhanced positions** created to stabilize rural and northern staffing:
  - 201 new positions filled
  - 49 enhanced positions filled
  - 65 new registered nurse roles filled across 30 communities
- ✓ **77 new and enhanced positions added** for 40 rural and northern communities, mainly in emergency rooms (69 filled to date).
- ✓ 336 Saskatchewan International Physician Practice Assessment physicians strengthening care across Saskatchewan, with **74 per cent practicing in rural or northern communities.**



## Training

- ✓ **Expanded training in the province by supporting 900+ new training seats across 33 programs — \$170 million invested** since December 2022.
- ✓ **Medical school seats expanded** from 100 to 108 since 2022 (increased 68 seats or 80 per cent since 2007).
- ✓ **Medical residency seats expanded** from 140-150 in 2025 (increased 90 seats or 150 per cent since 2007).
- ✓ **60 new training seats added for 2025–26**, including medical radiation technologists, licensed practical nurses, registered nurses, and nurse practitioner programs.
- ✓ **Four new Saskatchewan based training programs** announced in fall of 2025:
  - Physician Assistant Program
  - Occupational Therapy
  - Speech-Language Pathology
  - Respiratory Therapy
- ✓ **Three pilot high-school-to-health-care pathways** launched in Moose Jaw/Gravelbourg, Maple Creek/Cabri and La Ronge, helping high school students interested in a health care career by providing opportunities to work in a health care setting.
- ✓ Job shadow opportunities are available for high school students (grade 12) or adults considering a career in health care, **146 job shadows, totaling 944 hrs** have been completed since 2024.
- ✓ **25 additional Saskatchewan SIIT Mental Health & Wellness seats added** to support the Saskatoon Urgent Care Centre and Indigenous communities.
- ✓ **New rural family medicine training sites** in Yorkton, Melfort, and Nipawin — adding to the existing five training sites of Swift Current, North Battleford, Prince Albert, La Ronge, and Moose Jaw.
- ✓ Expanded medical school training by **establishing the University of Saskatchewan College of Medicine Regina Campus** to allow those living in the south of the province access to education closer to home.
- ✓ Increased post-secondary seats for primary care paramedic training from **152 to 252 since 2023**.



## Next Steps

### 1. Streamline Health Care Recruitment

- Strengthen the mandate of the Saskatchewan Healthcare Recruitment Agency (SHRA) to streamline all provincial recruitment efforts, allowing the Saskatchewan Health Authority to focus more fully on delivering patient care.
- Enhance SHRA's branding and national/international profile to increase competitiveness and create a single, clear entry point and candidate resource for health care recruitment in Saskatchewan.

### 2. Incentivize

- Expand the **Rural Physician Incentive Program** to regional centres, such as Yorkton, Moose Jaw and North Battleford.
- Maintain and expand the **Rural and Remote Recruitment Incentive** for high priority health care classifications.
- Continue **Graduate Retention Program** supports and targeted physician/specialist incentives.

### 3. Expand and Focus Training

- Add 20 more medical training seats at the College of Medicine - increasing from 108 to 128.
- Add 10 more residency seats
- Prioritize Saskatchewan students for medical school admissions - target of **95 per cent**.
- Continue adding training seats in high-demand areas.
- Expand rural training opportunities to support long-term recruitment and retention.
- Collaborate with the Saskatchewan Distance Learning Centre and school divisions to introduce enhanced health care training and earlier career exploration in high schools, helping students discover and prepare for careers in the sector.





# Why This Matters: Outcomes

## Timely Access to Care

- A larger, stronger workforce means shorter waits for primary care, emergencies, diagnostics and specialist services.

## Better Support for Rural and Remote Communities

- Recruiting and retaining doctors, nurses and paramedics reduces travel and prevents disruptions.

## Stronger Team-Based Care

- More trained professionals lead to better coordination, improved patient flow and less strain on emergency rooms.

## Long-Term Stability

- Training more providers at home and retaining them reduces turnover and reliance on temporary staff.

## Future Readiness

- A growing and resilient workforce ensures Saskatchewan can meet the needs of an aging population and increasing demand for services.

Strengthening the health care workforce is the foundation of Saskatchewan's Patients First approach, because every investment in infrastructure, technology and innovation depends on having skilled professionals who deliver care.

# Patients First Health Care Plan:

## Modernizing Care Delivery and Scope of Practice

Saskatchewan is expanding the scope of practice for frontline health care professionals to improve access, reduce wait times and ensure patients receive timely, effective care. By empowering nurse practitioners, pharmacists, paramedics and other providers to use the full extent of their training, the province is opening more entry points to health care, easing pressure on emergency rooms and strengthening team-based care across communities.

**Expanding scope of practice increases system capacity, improves co-ordination and supports a more adaptable, patient-focused health care system.**


Saskatchewan is already seeing results from expanded scopes of practice, innovative pilot programs and collaborative primary care models. The province is now moving forward with modernized policies that will position Saskatchewan as a national leader in scope expansion and ensure every health care professional can work to the full extent of their training.

Saskatchewan is also expanding innovative care options such as virtual, to ensure patients can access the right care, at the right time, in the right place. Too many people with urgent but non-emergency needs have relied on already busy emergency rooms, creating delays and adding pressure on hospitals.

By establishing urgent care centres (UCCs), advancing virtual care and strengthening digital tools and navigation supports, the province is giving patients faster, more convenient ways to get care.

Early investments, such as the Regina Urgent Care Centre, and the Virtual Physician Program, are already reducing emergency room pressure, supporting rural hospitals and bringing care closer to home.

Additional urgent care centres, expanded virtual supports, such as the first-in-Canada Virtual Health Hub (VHH), and improved system-wide navigation will continue building a more accessible, efficient and patient-focused system for Saskatchewan.



Early investments, such as the Regina Urgent Care Centre, the Virtual Physician Program and the first-in-Canada Virtual Health Hub, are already reducing emergency room pressure, supporting rural hospitals and bringing care closer to home.



# What We Have Done



## Expanded Scope of Practice

- ✓ Nurse practitioners now have authority to **admit and discharge patients** in long-term and acute care, freeing up physician time.
- ✓ **Pharmacists** are assessing and treating strep throat and ear infections, with over **7,300 patients seen** and **4,200 services delivered**.
- ✓ **Optometrists** are now providing glaucoma services, reducing delays for ophthalmology care.
- ✓ **Advanced care paramedics** can perform suturing for minor wounds.



## Urgent Care Centres

- ✓ **Regina Urgent Care Centre opened July 2024** and has already served **65,000 patients**, diverting many from the General and Pasqua emergency rooms.
- ✓ **The Regina Urgent Care Centre also incorporated a dedicated Mental Health and Addictions Intake space** to create a pathway to recovery and alleviate emergency room visits for these individuals.
- ✓ **The first Saskatoon Urgent Care Centre** is under construction and on track to open in early 2027, it will also have a dedicated mental health and addictions intake space.



## Virtual Care & Technology Innovation

- ✓ **The Virtual Physician Program** now supports **30 rural hospital sites** and has helped to avoid more than 5,220 potential emergency room service disruptions province-wide.
  - The Virtual Physician Program helps to retain rural and northern physicians by creating consult support and virtual team-based care.
- ✓ Partnered with Whitecap Dakota First Nation to establish the Virtual Health Hub (VHH) — the first of its kind in Canada — using advanced technology to support northern communities.
- ✓ Technicians for the Virtual Health Hub are being trained at SIIT through a program started in Fall 2024, strengthening Indigenous workforce participation and leadership. Training will prepare learners with the knowledge and skills required to support VHH operations and remote virtual care delivery.



## Point-of-Care Testing (POCT)

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- ✓ Enabling diagnostic testing directly in emergency rooms when labs are unavailable in rural settings.
  - ✓ **Over 300 service disruptions avoided** due to point-of-care-testing, helping rural emergency rooms remain open.
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## Patient Navigation Improvements

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- ✓ Alignment of **SK Virtual Visit**, **HealthLine 811**, and **MySaskHealthRecord** (which now has **750,000 registered users**).
  - Improved online access to personal health information and virtual connections, including the following information:
    - laboratory test results
    - medical imaging reports
    - immunization history
    - prescription history
    - clinical history





## Next Steps

### 1. Implementing Virtual Care

- Implement virtual primary care for unattached patients to reduce unnecessary visits, prevent unnecessary travel, and provide access to care.
- Enhance remote monitoring and chronic disease management
- Expand the **Virtual Physician Program**, complete a 2026 review, and recruit physicians nationally for rural and northern areas.

### 2. Optimizing Scope Across the Province

- Introduce Canada-leading expansion of scope legislation allowing all regulated health professions to work to their full potential:
  - align scopes of practice with national best standards
  - remove barriers across professions
  - expand roles for health care professionals, such as dietitians, optometrists, pharmacy technicians and others, so they can safely work to the top of their trained skills
- Work with Saskatchewan Health Authority and regulatory partners to ensure all providers practice to the top of their existing scope of training.
- Identify new opportunities to broaden the roles of nurse practitioners and allied health professionals, including occupational therapists, physical therapists, and speech-language pathologists, province-wide.
- Enable and support team-based care models that allow each professional to practice to the top of their scope and refer tasks to the appropriate provider.

### 3. Expanded Scope for All Health Professions

- Continued expansion of scope for nurse practitioners, pharmacists and other professions.
- Potential updates include:
  - nurse practitioners with expanded hospital privileges, emergency room oversight and greater long-term care responsibilities
  - pharmacists will be able to order labs, perform point-of-care-testing and prescribe for more minor ailments

#### 4. Modernizing Policies to Improve Patient Care

- Comprehensive review and modernization of Saskatchewan Health Authority operational policies to:
  - remove unnecessary administration barriers

#### 5. Expansion of Urgent Care Centres

- Five additional urgent care centres in development:
  - Prince Albert
  - North Battleford
  - Moose Jaw
  - Regina (second location)
  - Saskatoon (second location)

#### 6. Standardized Staffing Models

- Implement consistent staffing models for all health care workers to:
  - strengthen teamwork
  - clarify expectations
  - improve continuity and workplace stability

#### 7. Improving Patient Navigation

- Ensure the provincial **virtual care approach** has integrated navigation across virtual and in-person care to connect patients, providers, and services through virtual tools and shared clinical supports.





# Why This Matters: Outcomes

## Stronger Rural & Northern Care Access

- Expanded scope and team-based models ensure more services are available **closer to home**, reducing travel and service disruptions.
- Virtual care and urgent care centres reduce travel, increase access to specialist and diagnostic advice and stabilize rural services.

## A More Resilient Workforce

- Modern scopes make better use of the workforce Saskatchewan already has. Providers are better supported, more effective, and more valued.

## Better Access & Faster Care

- Patients can connect with providers quickly through virtual care, urgent care and clearer navigation pathways.

## Reduced Pressure on Emergency Rooms

- Patients with non-emergency needs have alternative care options, decreasing unnecessary emergency room visits.

## More Coordinated, Convenient Care

- Integrated digital tools help patients move smoothly between primary care, diagnostics, specialist consults and urgent/emergency services.

## Improved Patient Experience

- Navigation tools, virtual visits, and urgent care centres create more predictable and patient-friendly care options.

## Increased System Resilience

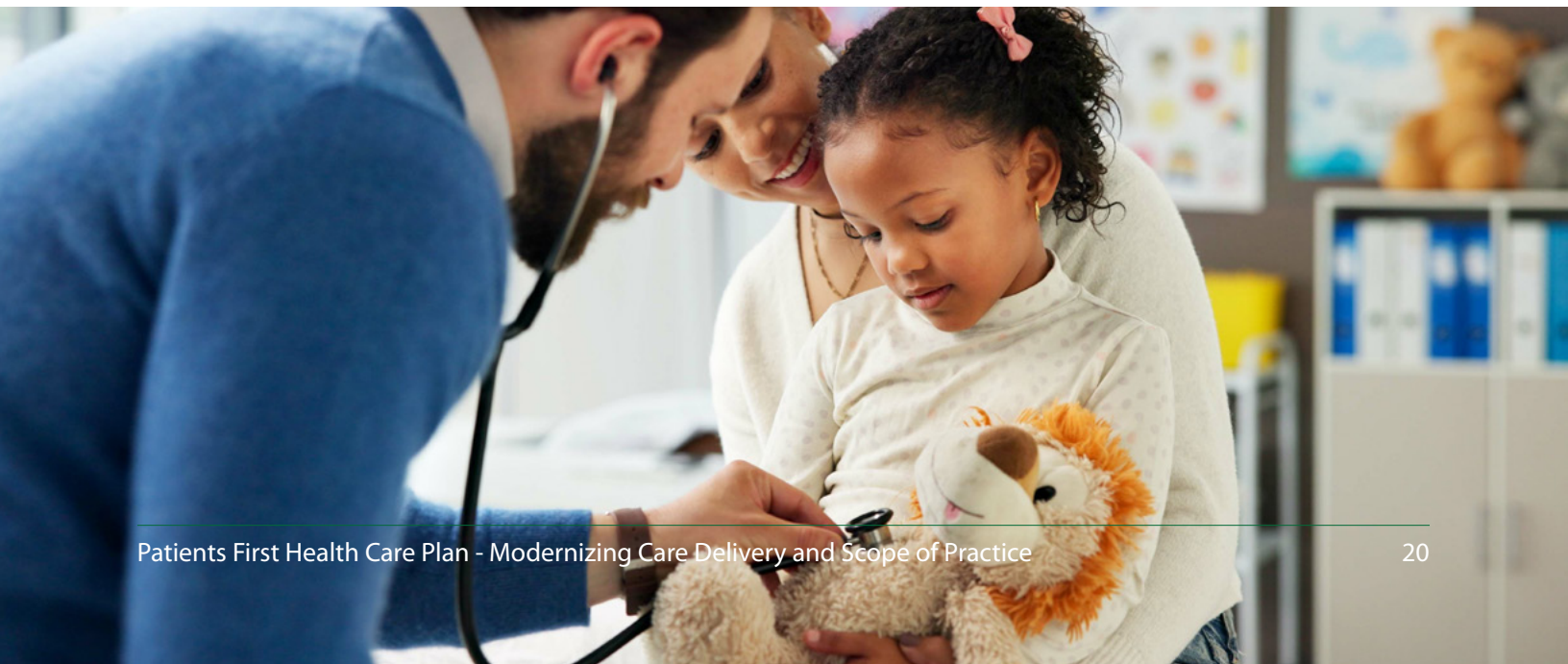
- Technology and virtual support stabilize services during workforce shortages and high-demand periods.

## Future-Ready Health System

- Investments in virtual health and digital infrastructure prepare Saskatchewan to meet growing and evolving needs, ensuring care remains timely and accessible.

## A True Patients First System

- Patients can access the **right provider at the right time**, a foundational step in ensuring everyone in Saskatchewan has access to a primary care provider by the end of 2028.



# Patients First Health Care Plan:

## Improving Safe and Quality Care

Saskatchewan is taking concrete steps to create safer, more supportive health care environments for patients and providers. Rising incidents of violence in hospitals across Canada have underscored the need for stronger security measures, while staffing pressures and heavy workloads have affected the morale and well-being of health care workers.

To respond, the province has enhanced safety in emergency rooms, introduced targeted security measures in multiple communities and initiated independent safety reviews.

At the same time, Saskatchewan is working to improve workplace culture through mentorship, system-wide leadership reviews, improved support for managers and strategies to reduce overtime and absenteeism. Together, these actions protect patients, promote workforce stability and support consistent, high-quality care.

*“Safety concerns are not new, but we have reached the point where we cannot carry on without your support.”*

- Concerned Health Care Worker,  
January 11, 2026

## What We Have Done



### Safe Facilities

- ✓ Strengthened safety measures across health facilities.
- ✓ Installed **additional metal detectors and enhanced 24/7 security** in urban emergency rooms to address rising incidents of violence.
- ✓ Launched targeted safety initiatives to protect patients, staff and visitors.



### Workplace Culture & Employee Engagement

- ✓ Introduced a **Mentorship/Peer-to-Peer Support Program** to support continuous learning, resiliency and well-being (343 participants as of January 2026; 30 workshops delivered).
- ✓ Reinforced commitment to maintaining services that prioritizes patient care and workforce stability.



## Next Steps

### 1. Safe Facilities

- Implement enhanced security services in eight more communities:
  - La Loche      - Swift Current      - Weyburn      - Melfort
  - Shellbrook      - Moose Jaw      - Nipawin      - Kamsack
- Conduct an **independent, province-wide safety and security review** examining protective services and identifying improvements.

### 2. Workplace Culture & Employee Engagement

- Implement a province-wide approach to support managers in developing staff, improving processes and responsibly managing human resources.
- Examine health worker absenteeism through third-party attendance and return-to-work service, with the goal of improving staff support and reducing overtime.
- Engage unions as partners in strengthening workplace stability and patient care.
- Reduce **physician administrative burden** to reduce paperwork and free up more time for direct patient care.



## Why This Matters: Outcomes

### Safe, Secure Care Environments

- Protects patients, visitors and staff as violence and weapons become more common in health care settings across Canada.
- Ensure providers can focus fully on delivering care without fear or distraction.

### Better Patient Care Through Workforce Stability

- Addressing burnout, overtime and staffing shortages leads to more consistent, attentive care.
- Well-supported workers deliver more compassionate, focused, and effective care.

### Stronger, More Reliable Health Services

- Enhanced security, improved leadership structures and better HR practices help stabilize services across communities.
- Patients experience fewer disruptions and more dependable access to care.

### A True Patients First System

- Safe facilities and a supported workforce are foundational to a sustainable, high-quality health system.
- When staff are safe and valued, patient care improves, and system performance strengthens.

# Patients First Health Care Plan:

## Improving Facilities and Equipment

Putting patients first means investing in the facilities, equipment and infrastructure that make safe, high-quality health care possible. Saskatchewan has made significant investments in health capital, building new facilities and modernizing existing ones to enhance the patient experience, expand diagnostic and treatment capacity, and equip care teams with the tools and spaces they need to provide high-quality care.

## What We Have Done

### Facilities

- ✓ **\$2.3 billion invested** in health capital since 2018.
- ✓ Major new hospitals and integrated health facilities opened since 2018, including:
  - Jim Pattison Children's Hospital - Saskatoon
  - Saskatchewan Hospital North Battleford
  - Leader & District Integrated Healthcare Facility
  - Regina Urgent Care Centre
  - Meadow Lake NorthWest Community Lodge long-term care centre
  - Royal University Hospital New Adult Emergency Department
- ✓ Expanded **ICU capacity** at Royal University Hospital.
- ✓ Upgraded electrical infrastructure across health facilities.
- ✓ Built a dedicated dialysis unit in the Meadow Lake Hospital to reduce patient travel and bring care closer to home.
- ✓ Expanded dialysis units in North Battleford and Fort Qu'Appelle.
- ✓ Expanded the NICU in Prince Albert to care for more babies closer to home.
- ✓ Renovated **SHA-operated pharmacies** to improve patient flow and safety.
- ✓ Built the **Regina General Hospital parkade**, adding 686 parking spaces for patients, families and staff.
- ✓ Opened the **St. Paul's Hospital front entrance** and the **Kikâwînow Wiki Healing Centre**.
- ✓ Exempted northern projects (e.g. **La Ronge LTC**) from the 20 per cent community capital cost share.



## Next Steps

- 1. Expanding Care Closer to Home**
  - Expand long-term care delivery through community partnerships:
    - Third-party design/build/own/operate long term care homes in **Estevan and Watson**.
- 2. Supporting Communities and Health Foundations**
  - **Reduce the community share** of design and construction costs for new long-term care centres and hospitals from 20 per cent to 10 per cent.
- 3. Major New Infrastructure Projects**
  - **Prince Albert Victoria Hospital expansion** to increase capacity by 40 per cent for northern communities and reduce pressure on Saskatoon.
  - **New 240-bed specialized long-term care home in Regina**, serving seniors with dementia, acquired brain injury and complex behavioural needs.
  - **Complete the new Weyburn hospital** replacing aging infrastructure in a growing region.
  - Complete the **Saskatoon Urgent Care Centre** (early 2027).
  - **New Yorkton Hospital** in the pre-design stage.
  - **New Rosthern Hospital** in pre-procurement planning stage.
  - Building new **long term care facilities** in La Ronge, Grenfell, Estevan, and Watson.
  - **Esterhazy** integrated health care facility.



## Why This Matters: Outcomes

### Safer, More Reliable Facilities

- Modernized infrastructure improves patient safety, reduces outages and supports high-quality clinical environments.

### Improved Access Close to Home

- Expanded services, new beds and new LTC homes reduce travel for patients, especially in rural and northern communities.

### Faster Diagnostics & Treatment

- Upgraded imaging and clinical spaces shorten wait times, improve patient flow and support timely treatment decisions.

### Dignity & Comfort for Seniors

- Purpose-built long-term care homes support better living environments for seniors and families.

### Stronger, More Resilient System

- Up-to-date facilities enable advanced care (ICUs, imaging, specialized treatments) and support staff to work effectively.

### A True Patients First Experience

- Patients receive **the right care, in the right place, at the right time**, supported by facilities designed for today and ready for tomorrow.

# Conclusion

Saskatchewan's health system is undergoing one of its most comprehensive, patient-focused transformations ever. From primary care and diagnostics to workforce development, urgent and emergency services, seniors' care and health infrastructure, the province is taking deliberate, measurable steps to ensure people get the right care, in the right place, at the right time.

This report highlights the major changes underway across the province, organized into the following key sections:

- 1. Expanding Access to Care**
- 2. Improving Recruitment, Retention and Training**
- 3. Modernizing Care Delivery and Scope of Practice**
- 4. Improving Safe and Quality Care**
- 5. Improving Facilities and Equipment**

These sections highlight Saskatchewan's coordinated effort to expand access, strengthen teams, modernize infrastructure and respond to the needs of patients, providers and communities.

Allowing an unlimited number of nurse practitioners to be contracted for primary care in the province and incentivizing registered nurses to pursue their nurse practitioner training, will connect tens of thousands of patients to a dedicated provider, reduce pressure on emergency rooms and provide continuity of care.

Team-based and collaborative models are essential to truly putting patients first. By bringing the right professionals together at the right time, these approaches make care more accessible, coordinated and consistent. They strengthen continuity, improve patient flow and ensure individuals receive seamless support throughout their health journey.

Improvements in hospitals, diagnostic, and surgical capacity are and will continue to dramatically reduce wait times and ensure patients receive care closer to home. These strategic investments are clearing backlogs, speeding up diagnoses, improving outcomes, and expanding access to the specialized care families rely on — delivering meaningful change across the entire health system.

Investments in recruitment and training are building a more stable, resilient workforce capable of meeting rising demand and supporting long-term sustainability.

Modernized scopes of practice and innovations such as virtual care and point-of-care testing are reducing bottlenecks and expanding access in rural and northern communities.

Enhanced safety measures, workplace supports and stronger leadership structures are improving the care environment for both patients and providers. With \$2.3 billion invested in health capital since 2018, including new hospitals, modernized emergency rooms, long-term care homes, imaging upgrades and expanded clinical capacity — Saskatchewan is building facilities ready for the future.

**Together, these actions reaffirm a clear commitment:**

**Saskatchewan is putting patients first by improving access to primary care and timely surgeries. By building on what works and fixing what does not, we will create a stronger, more accessible and more resilient health care system for everyone — protecting the future of health care for everyone in our province.**

# ***Patients First***

— HEALTH CARE PLAN —

*Right Care. Right Time.*

March 2026

[saskatchewan.ca/patientsfirst](https://saskatchewan.ca/patientsfirst)

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