



Stroke Care Alberta

Advancing care, increasing access and improving outcomes for stroke patients across Alberta while lowering costs

Our challenge	Results to date	
<p>Stroke affects 5,000 Albertans each year</p> <hr/> <p>1 in 6 stroke victims die and 90% of survivors have a disability</p> <hr/> <p>\$370 million spent caring for stroke patients in Alberta in the first year alone</p>	<p>Reduced door-to-needle times from ↓ 70 min to 39 min in urban and rural sites¹</p> <hr/> <p>Early treatment reduces death and disability. Speed is a critical factor. Time is brain.</p>	<p>28% fewer patients admitted to long-term care</p> <hr/> <p>Length of stay reduced from 6 days to 5 days Estimated savings of 3,377 bed days = \$3.3 million^{2,3}</p> <hr/> <p><i>Better outcomes, value and healthcare sustainability</i></p>

What was the issue?

Five thousand Albertans have a stroke each year. Stroke is the leading cause of adult disability and the third leading cause of death. Nearly 15% of people who have a stroke die, and 90% are left with disability, often severe enough to require long-term care.

Research shows that when strokes are treated quickly (with clot-busting drugs or by opening up the blocked blood vessel to the brain), and when patients receive the right rehabilitation and care following a stroke, they recover faster and have less disability and less need for ongoing care.

What we did to address it

The Cardiovascular Health and Stroke SCN has been working with health partners across the province to develop Stroke Care Alberta, an overarching strategy that aims to provide best-in-class stroke care. The strategy focuses on the full spectrum of stroke services—from emergency response and hospital care to in-home rehabilitation.

Foundational work was completed from 2005 to 2011 with the Alberta Provincial Stroke Strategy. When the SCN launched in 2012, we built on this work and continued to advance stroke care in Alberta. We engaged patients, clinicians and operational leaders and together developed a patient-focused, system-wide stroke program. The goal was to better coordinate stroke services so Albertans could readily access the care they needed no matter where they live.

The program focused on improving patient outcomes by providing rapid clinical evaluation and treatment, and ensuring all patients—including those in rural areas—had access to the same comprehensive stroke care and rehabilitation services. Initially, the team focused on improving care at 14 primary stroke centres located in towns and rural areas across Alberta.

“The Stroke Action Plan took some of the successes we had in large stroke centers and translated these to rural and small urban settings,” explains Dr. Tom Jeerakathil,

a stroke neurologist and one of the project leads. These centres increased their use of standard order sets so patients received consistent, high quality care. They also received rehabilitation sooner (88% within 48 hours, up from 74%) and access to in home rehabilitation services (e.g., physiotherapy, speech therapy, nurses, social workers) to help them regain their independence.

How this work is making a difference

This work has touched the lives of thousands of Albertans. Patients are returning home sooner following a stroke and receiving the same standard of care regardless of where they live. Door-to-needle times across Alberta have decreased from 70 to 39 minutes, which is helping reduce the risk of dying and disability after stroke.

Thanks to sustained effort and commitment by operational leaders, frontline staff, therapists and all health partners, Alberta has become an international leader in stroke care. This includes its use of endovascular therapy, which has been shown to save lives and dramatically reduce disability for large, disabling strokes. Since launching this program, overall endovascular therapy volumes have increased by 38%, and access to this therapy has more than doubled in non-urban zones.

These outcomes demonstrate the strength of the stroke community in Alberta. By collaborating and aligning our efforts, we’ve successfully implemented several quality improvement initiatives and scaled them across the province. More than 225 frontline professionals have contributed to these efforts and have helped improve stroke outcomes and care across Alberta.

What’s next?

The SCN continues to work with patients, families and our network of passionate stroke partners to expand on this work. We’re currently developing novel approaches for stroke rehabilitation that provide value across the entire system of care.

I have never in all my years felt this level of team cohesiveness before and it directly benefits the patient.

~ Sarah, care provider, Camrose

It’s just an amazing program. They actually treat the whole person, not just the physical, but the emotional and mental. And not just the patient, but also the spouse.

~ Jane, caregiver, Grande Prairie

Receiving care in the home helps a lot. It really helps, because you’re in your own environment and you’re not so afraid... you’re happy.

~ Edna, stroke patient, Camrose

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