"INTEROPERABILITY SAVES LIVES" OFFERS SOLUTIONS FOR ALBERTA'S HEALTHCARE SYSTEM

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Canada's healthcare system is facing critical challenges, putting the health and safety of Canadians at risk. While a response to the current crisis is urgent, there are also opportunities to reinforce a strong foundation for the future of the healthcare system.

The [Alberta Virtual Care Coordinating Body (AVCCB)](#) is a non-partisan and broad collective of Alberta healthcare stakeholders, including patient and Indigenous representatives, focused on providing evidence-based strategies to support better patient care and improved health outcomes. The AVCCB focuses on **"virtual care"** which is the sharing of health information between members of health care teams, across location or time, to enable quality patient care and improved health and wellbeing.

The AVCCB has just released their highly anticipated report "*[Interoperability Saves Lives](#)",* focusing on the importance of health data exchange or interoperability. Healthcare teams cannot function safely if they lack access to information, cannot communicate effectively, or cannot share information needed to provide quality care. Interoperability is essential for high-functioning virtual care, and indeed all health care system function.

"It is not a secret that our health care system is deeply stressed and failing Canadians on some levels," said Dr. Ewan Affleck, Chair of the AVCCB, physician and Canadian expert in data governance and health informatics. "Information is essential when making decisions about a patient's care", says Dr. Affleck, "running a health-care system with fragmented information is like flying a plane with hidden instruments."

The "Interoperability Saves Lives" report focuses on a holistic, patient-centred approach to health information system design. "As this report highlights, we must implement health data interoperability without delay," said Tim Murphy, Vice-President Health, Alberta Innovates and Chair of the Data Interoperability subcommittee. "We can no longer endure a fractured healthcare system that provides uncoordinated services, elevated costs, stifled innovation and suboptimal care. Albertans and Canadians deserve better."

The core recommendations of the report include:

- Health data interoperability in Alberta should be mandated through legislation.

- The oversight of health data interoperability design and management in Alberta must include meaningful public and Indigenous representation.

- Health data interoperability oversight should be public-facing, accountable, and fully transparent.

- The design and management of health data interoperability should not be hampered by the agenda of any given organization or interest group, nor subject to the limitations imposed by electoral or capital funding cycles.

- Alberta should endorse and adopt the *Health Data Charter* as a guiding framework for all provincial health data design and management, including health data interoperability.

- The adoption of health data interoperability in Alberta should align with national efforts.

- All Albertans should have comprehensive internet connectivity to ensure equitable virtual health care access.

Teri Price, co-chair of the AVCCB and co-founder and Executive Director of [Greg's Wings](), a nationally recognized, not-for-profit that focuses on supporting improvement in our healthcare systems, understands the impact of the lack of access or sharing patient information all too well. In 2012, her brother Greg Price died of complications after testicular cancer surgery. An independent review of his case by the Health Quality Council of Alberta found that the delay or lack of sharing of critical information between those responsible for his care, contributed to his death. All the missteps in his case meant it took over 400 days from his initial symptoms until he received treatment.

"While there have been some changes in the ten years since Greg's death there is still a need to create the conditions where patients will no longer fall through the cracks," says Price. "Safe and quality care requires teamwork and until we have a system that enables a patient's care team to seamlessly share and access information needed to make safe decisions, there is a very real safety risk that will continue to cause harm."

The full "interoperability Saves Lives" report is available at [albertavirtualcare.org.]()

For media enquiries, please contact:

Dr. Ewan Affleck
[Ewan.affleck@cpsa.ab.ca]()

Teri Price
[Teri@gregswings.ca]()

Tim Murphy
[Tim.murphy@albertainnovates.ca]()