



Advocacy Toolkit

Board and Supporter

Last Updated: May 27, 2024

Background

ATRA and the Pathway to Regulation

Since 1985, the Alberta Therapeutic Recreation Association (ATRA) has represented recreation therapists across the province. ATRA is a member-driven association representing a growing number of health professionals across the province. ATRA is dedicated to promoting professional therapeutic recreation services for Albertans with physical and mental illness, addictions, aging and disabling conditions. ATRA supports all of its members through professional development opportunities and consistent practice for therapeutic recreation across the province.

Recreation therapy is a strong, innovative profession in Alberta. Recreation therapists contribute essential front-line daily care to rural and urban Albertans across health sectors. ATRA has been striving toward professional regulation to provide improved oversight and enhance public protection, improve consistency, accountability, public safety, and trust in caring for vulnerable Albertans.

Your Advocacy in Action

1. Write a letter to your local MLA
2. Meet with your local MLA
3. Get engaged during ATRA events
4. Spread the word in your community

What do you need?

KEY MESSAGES

Key messages are most impactful when they are clear, concise and consistent. Review the **key messages** provided in this toolkit and get comfortable with them. Do not provide the key messages to your MLA but, if necessary, have them in front of you during a call or meeting to help guide the discussion.

WHY KEY MESSAGES

- Improves accuracy and stability of your organization's position
- Focuses thoughts and improves delivery of speaking and writing to enhance clarity and understanding
- Gets everyone moving in the same direction to enhance amplification of messaging

MEETING AGENDAS

Prepare an agenda for the meeting. Include notes/evidence about what is needed in your community.

Key Messages

Commitment

ATRA is committed to ensuring Albertans have access to quality care across Alberta

- The Alberta Therapeutic Recreation Association has represented recreation therapists across the province since 1985.
- ATRA is a member-driven association dedicated to promoting the provision of professional therapeutic recreation service for Albertans.
- Recreation work in both rural and urban settings through the continuum of care from acute care to community and care settings (Continuing Care Type A, B, C).
- Members of ATRA serve in the most rural and remote areas of Alberta including:

Vital Role

ATRA upholds the highest quality standards for the profession of therapeutic recreation in Alberta

- Elevate and advance the practice for therapeutic recreation across the province through clearly defined entry to practice criteria, standards of practice, code of ethics and continued competence criteria.
- Provide professional development opportunities, mentoring and networking channels to increase the knowledge, skills and abilities of its over 800 members.

Significant Change

Regulation of recreation therapists is in the best interest of the public and aligns with the Government of Alberta priorities on enabling and improving access to timely care.

- Regulation will play an essential part in enhancing public protection, improving consistency, accountability, public safety, and trust in caring for vulnerable Albertans.
- Regulation will improve the public's trust with established legislative, regulatory, and administrative mechanisms to ensure the highest standards of service quality, competency, and professional conduct.

- Regulation heightens awareness, confidence, and expectations of the general public, patients, employers, and other health professionals.
- Without regulatory oversight, Albertans accessing unregulated services could be at risk for:
 - Lack of enforceable boundaries between therapist and client
 - Breach of privacy
 - Incompetent practice and lack of skills causing harm to client
 - Patient safety concern
 - Poor business and/or pricing practices
- The additional influx of regulated health professionals will support the government's commitment to Albertans to have access to world-class health care locally when and where they need it.
- Regulating recreation therapists provides minimal incremental burden to the Alberta health care system as they are already working in the system.
- Regulating recreation therapy would see no increase in government red-tape or costs as the profession's regulatory college is already and will be funded by its membership.

A Stronger Ecosystem

The addition of Recreation Therapist (RecT) health care professionals to the front-line will reduce the burden of disease for both patients and the health system.

- RecTs are trained to use personalized, planned, and purposeful recreation and leisure activities towards achieving sustained independent functioning and enable a productive, high quality of life for Albertans.
- RecTs can support Albertans of all ages with physical and mental illnesses, addictions, aging, and disabling conditions, **anywhere** in Alberta.

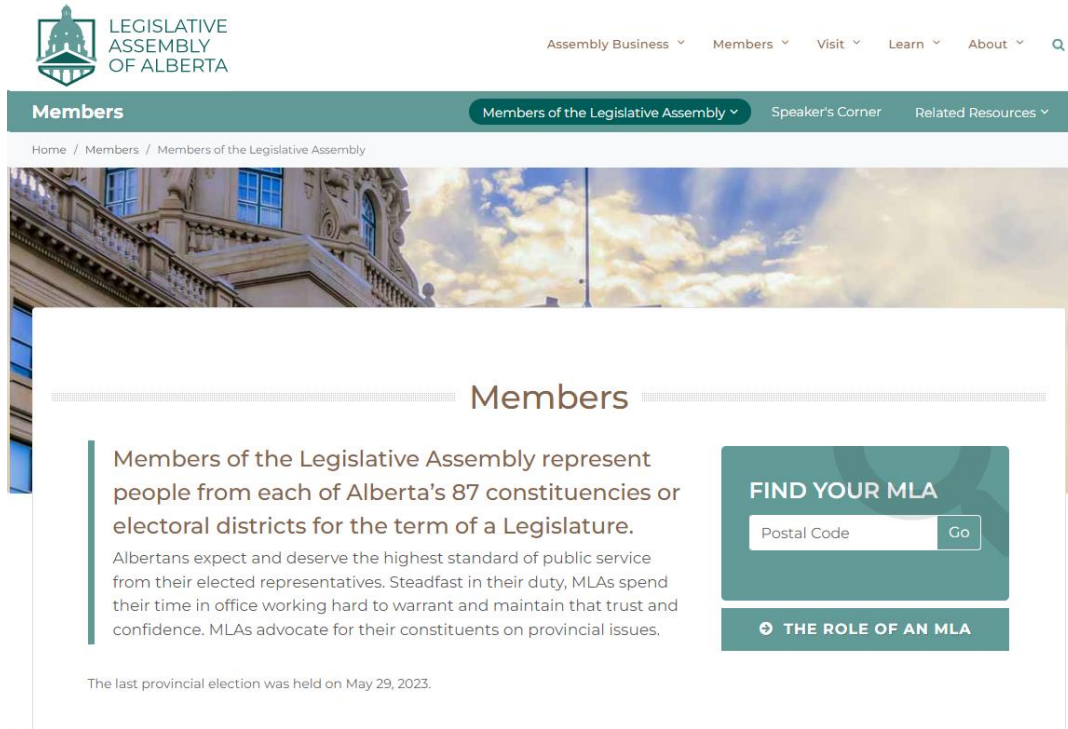
Call to Action

- We ask for your commitment to:
 - Support continued improvement to healthcare and ensuring Albertans get the care they need, where they need it and when they need it.
 - Empower allied health professionals, specifically recreation therapists, to ensure an effective multidisciplinary approach to patient care.
 - Champion recreation therapists efforts towards regulation that will enable accountability, safety, and the highest level of care for all Albertans.

How to Engage

Finding Your MLA

Step 1: Use the Alberta Legislative Assembly [Find your MLA tool](#) to find out who your MLA is.



Step 2: Enter your postal code

Step 3: For additional details and a brief bio on your local MLA, visit the respective caucus website to find out more.

United Conservative Party (UCP): <https://www.unitedconservative.ca/mlas/>

New Democratic Party (NDP): <https://www.albertandp.ca/mlas>

Step 4: Use the email template found on page 8 to reach out to your local MLA. Customize the email by filling in the highlighted fields and remember to personalize your email.

Note: Ensure that the ATRA leadership is aware of your outreach to ensure a cohesive and unified approach and messaging.

This includes contacting **Bev Suntjens, President** (president@alberta-tr.ca) and **Amanda Ervin, Executive Director** (executivedirector@alberta-tr.ca) ahead of your outreach and copying them on your outreach communication. The Leadership team will be able to provide any recent updates, language and topic suggestions, and any support needed for your engagement, including attending the meeting with you.

Write a Letter to your MLA

To send a letter, copy and customize the draft below and send to the email address provided on your local MLA's email:

[Name of MLA]

MLA for [Riding]

Delivered via email: [MLA's Email]

[Date]

Dear MLA [Last Name],

Thank you for your dedication to representing the community of [insert community/constituency]. I am a proud constituent and [insert your role i.e., Board Member, Health Researcher, Supporter of] of the Alberta Therapeutic Recreation Association (ATRA).

I am writing today to ask for your commitment and share my support of recreation therapists to become regulated in Alberta. As a [RecT/patient/family member/supporter/health researcher/as someone who has been positively impacted by recreation therapy], I am encouraged by your government's efforts in refocusing our healthcare system to ensure that Albertans are receiving the care they need, when they need it, and importantly, where they need it.

Therapeutic recreation supports Albertans of all ages with physical and mental illness, addictions, aging and disabling conditions. Our evidence-based approaches focus on aligning with people's interests and strengths to develop an appropriate care plan that will help them reach the goal of improved sustained independent functioning. This in turn increases wellness, level of social connection, involvement in the community and overall quality of life. Recreation therapists work in urban and rural settings throughout the continuum of the public health care system, including acute care, rehabilitation (physical and mental health/addictions programs), community, adult day program and continuing care (Type A, B, and C), and private practice.

Since 1985, ATRA has represented recreation therapists across the province, today numbering over 800. ATRA is currently undertaking the work necessary for the regulation of recreation therapists, to provide oversight of the profession and ensure the safety of Albertans as well as advancement of the profession.

I wholly support the ATRA's work towards regulation of the profession to ensure public safety, accountability, and the delivery of high-quality care for Albertans. I ask that you raise the importance of allied health professionals as critical partners in the refocusing of the health care system, and particularly the invaluable contribution and impact that recreation therapists have in the care and quality of life for all Albertans across the province.

Thank you again for your continued dedication to public service.

Sincerely,

[Name, Title]

Request a Meeting with your MLA

To request a meeting, send the email below to the email address provided on your local MLA's email.

***NOTE: Please put this content of this meeting request in the body of an email, do not attach as a separate document**

[Name of MLA]
MLA for [Riding]
Delivered via email: [MLA's Email]

[Date]

Email Subject: Meeting Request – Alberta Therapeutic Recreation

Dear MLA [Last Name],

Thank you for your dedication to representing the community of [insert community/constituency]. I am a proud constituent and [insert your role i.e., Board Member, Health Researcher, Supporter of] of the Alberta Therapeutic Recreation Association (ATRA).

I am writing today to request a meeting with you. I would appreciate the opportunity to share my experience [story or experience - as a RecT/patient/family member/supporter/health researcher/as someone who has been positively impacted by recreational therapy], and the challenges and opportunities towards improving care in the community.

Therapeutic recreation supports Albertans of all ages with physical and mental illness, addictions, aging and disabling conditions. The evidence-based approaches of RecT focuses on aligning with people's interests and strengths to develop an appropriate care plan that helps them reach the goal of improved sustained independent functioning. This in turn increases wellness, level of social connection, involvement in the community and overall quality of life. Recreation therapists work in urban and rural settings throughout the continuum of the public health care system, including acute care, rehabilitation (physical and mental health/addictions programs), community, adult day program and continuing care (Type A, B, and C), and private practice.

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I look forward to hearing from you to schedule a time for this meeting.

Sincerely,

[Name, Title]

Meet your MLA

Meetings will generally fall into two basic categories:

1. Those who have little or no exposure to the topics being discussed, they will need a little bit of a primer and require more background information.
2. Those who have more knowledge about the topics and may have worked with you before, they will be more interested in the current state of the issues and what you are seeking from government.

Before the meeting:

- Decide who (if more than one member is in the meeting) on the team is responsible for maintaining notes, using the report card form found in the briefing binder. Of key importance will be the key issues raised and any agreed-upon follow-up items.

During the meeting:

- Coordinate the introductions when you arrive.
- Thank the host(s).
- Confirm the time available and spell out the objectives of the meeting.
 - Brief overview of the ATRA.
 - Brief overview of your personal experience as a RecT professional/advocate, and/or as an individual who have benefited from recreation therapy.
 - Why are we here today? **To raise awareness about the profession of recreation therapy generally, the value of localizing allied healthcare professionals, and the valuable impact self-regulation of the profession can have on strengthening and growing Alberta's healthcare workforce.**
 - Brief overview of benefits to:
 - Public
 - Employers
 - Province
- **ASK:** We ask for your commitment to:
 - Support continued improving healthcare and ensuring Albertans get the care they need when they need it.

- Empower allied health professionals, specifically recreation therapists, to ensure an effective multidisciplinary approach to patient care.
 - Champion the recreation therapists efforts towards regulation that will enable accountability, safety, and the highest level of care for all Albertans.
 - Could you advocate/champion on our behalf towards the approval of our request for self-regulation? We would value a letter from you to the Minister of Health stating your support of the matter.
- At the appropriate time, help the host wrap-up the meeting and thank the host.

After the meeting:

- After you meet with the local MLA, email them thanking them for their time and reiterate the key messages and takeaways from your meeting.
- Email **Bev Suntjens, President** (president@alberta-tr.ca) and **Amanda Ervin, Executive Director** (executivedirector@alberta-tr.ca) to let them know you have completed the engagement.
 - Provide a summary of the conversation
 - Issues raised
 - Questions asked
 - Feedback from the MLA
 - Follow-ups requested

Get Engaged During Recreation Therapy Month (February, 2025)

February 2025 is *Recreation Therapy Month*. This is an opportunity to highlight the unique and important work and impact of recreation therapy on social media. Please follow us [@atraalberta](#) on X/Twitter and engage in the conversation by retweeting or quote tweeting us.



Step 1: Follow us on X/Twitter [@atraalberta](#)

Step 2: Retweet or Quote Tweet ATRA's tweet during Therapeutic Recreation Month

Step 3: Tag your local MLA in your quote tweet. Use hashtags [#ABGetWell](#)
[#TherapeuticRecreation](#) [#Celebration](#) [#ABpoli](#)

Sample Tweet or Quote Tweet:

Did you know February is Therapeutic Recreation Month in Alberta? What are your priorities for women's health? [#ABGetWell](#) [#TherapeuticRecreation](#) [#Celebration](#) [#ABpoli](#)

Spread the Word

One of the most effective ways to ensure that your MLA internalizes your key messages is if you **spread the word in your community**.

Take any opportunity to share your key messages with your neighbours, whether it is at the community pool or the neighbourhood association picnic. Your neighbours might raise your key messages with MLAs that they may have personal relationships with.

When MLAs hear the same messages coming from multiple directions, this maximizes the power of your message and makes them more likely to commit to addressing these issues.

FAQs

How do I ensure it's a successful meeting?

<u>Do's</u>	<u>Don't</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Be punctual● Dress appropriately● Prepare: Know what you are going to say. Have your materials prepared as a "leave behind". Research the politician's background, his/her interests, and his/her connection to your issue.● Rehearse: If you are going in as a group, meet beforehand to discuss who is going to say what and review potential questions and answers.● Be brief● Leave behind material: 1-page briefing note, fact sheet, etc.● Always follow up a meeting with a personal "thank you" note	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Threaten● Argue● Offer votes in exchange for support● Waste time with small talk● Discuss political fundraising● Raise questions that you are not prepared to answer● Never stretch the truth or you risk losing credibility - stick to the facts
<i>Be political... Not partisan.</i>	

How to address people

- Ministers: e.g. Minister Doe
- MLAs (who are not ministers): e.g. Mr. or Ms. Doe
- Deputy Ministers: e.g. Deputy Minister Doe
- Other government officials and political staff: by their first name

My local MLAs are not willing to meet with me – what do I do?

Although an in-person meeting is preferred if you are unable to meet with your MLA, send them another email with the key messages included in this toolkit.

Another option is to draft a letter with key messages, print it and bring them to their constituency office and a member of their team will likely meet with you and accept materials.

If you have a question about outreach efforts, who do I contact?

ATRA leaderships are here to support you. If you have questions, please contact **Amanda Ervin** (executivedirector@alberta-tr.ca)