



Recognizing 2025 Rhapsody Healthcare Heroes

Award nominee: Shelaine Woods

Community: Oyen and district

A registered nurse (RN) is being credited with stabilizing healthcare services in her community after a period of acute bed and emergency department closures at the local hospital due to staff shortages.

Two years ago, RN Shelaine Woods inherited a “barely skeletal staff” when she took on the role of site manager at Big Country Hospital in Oyen, which is in east central Alberta near the Saskatchewan border.

Many nurses had quit, retired, or moved away, leaving the community without a functioning emergency department for half of the day and no acute care beds.

“Shelaine was hired, and the collective community was elated,” writes Kelly Burgess, an RN who currently works with Woods at the hospital and was one of several community members who supports her nomination for a 2025 RhPAP Rhapsody Healthcare Heroes Award.

“Shelaine is homegrown and has a reputation in the community for being excellent in all that she does. She has been a highly respected registered nurse on the Oyen team for many years.

“In only two years, Shelaine has successfully recruited a nurse to every vacant position.”

Woods' collaboration with Alberta Health Services, hospital staff, other municipalities, community leaders, and the Acadia Foundation helped to streamline the area's healthcare services. She also reached out to South Central High School in Oyen to tap into the work experience program and helped re-implement the Dual Credit Health Care Aide program, where high school students earn credits toward the college program.

Woods also started integrating Internationally Educated Nurses in the community.

"In small communities, the ability to think outside the box and be creative as well as practical with service delivery is what is going to keep medical services both current and future going strong in rural Alberta," says Debbie Ross, who nominated Woods for the award.

Liz Westerlund, a volunteer with the East Sounding Creek 4-H Beef Club, agrees.

"One of Shelaine's best attributes is her ability to seek out alternatives when it seems like we've hit a dead end."

She credits Woods, who is also a 4-H leader, for helping the club raise \$63,000 from the sale of a steer and donating the proceeds to HALO Air Ambulance, the Southern Alberta helicopter emergency medical services.

"Rural life is very challenging to say the least, but having Shelaine in our community, dedicating her life to our rural healthcare and advocating to keep services going in our communities, makes it much safer for all of us to be out here."

[Click here to view the 2025 Rhapsody Nominees.](#)