

Two health professionals with nearly six decades of experience between them say shining a light on rural healthcare and its workers has lasting positive impacts.

Dr. Cecile Lavoie and Chantal Crawford were both recognized for their efforts during last year's RhPAP Rhapsody Awards, respectively receiving the Physician and Healthcare Heroes Awards.

The Rhapsody Awards have been handed out since 2002 to celebrate rural Alberta individuals and teams that exemplify dedication, compassion, and innovation within their communities. Awards are granted in two categories: the Rhapsody Physician Award and Rhapsody Healthcare Heroes Award, which can be an individual or team.

While last year's recipients are humbled, they say the awards are an excellent way to promote awareness of rural healthcare.

"Rural has just always been an underserved population and I truly believe that your geographical area, or where you live, should never hinder you from getting excellent health care," says Crawford, a registered nurse who now manages the Myron Thompson Health Centre in Sundre.

"That's probably one of my biggest mantras—anybody who lives rural should have the same access to excellent healthcare, and there should be no barrier just because you choose to live rural."



Chantal Crawford, site manager of the Myron Thompson Health Centre in Sundre, believes everyone should receive excellent healthcare whether they make their home in an urban or rural community. Her strong commitment to rural contributed to her being recognized as a recipient of RhPAP's Rhapsody Healthcare Heroes Award in 2025.

Crawford says the award was a boost to all the staff and “makes them honoured to work here and know we’re upholding a level of amazing care. We’re striving for better than just OK, we’re heading for excellence.”

Dr. Lavoie, who has practised full-time in Bonnyville since 1988, recently scaled back her work to one day a week, specializing in women’s health.

“I think the majority of our patients and also the majority of healthcare—I’m talking about the big city people—don’t realize all that’s involved with rural healthcare and how different it is,” says Lavoie who started in Bonnyville as a locum, or a physician who fills in for other doctors while they are away.

“Urban practice is very different in what we have to do. I had a good friend years ago who was a high-risk obstetrician, and she said, ‘I have to know a lot about a little bit. You guys have to know a little bit about a lot.’ I thought that summed it up very well.”

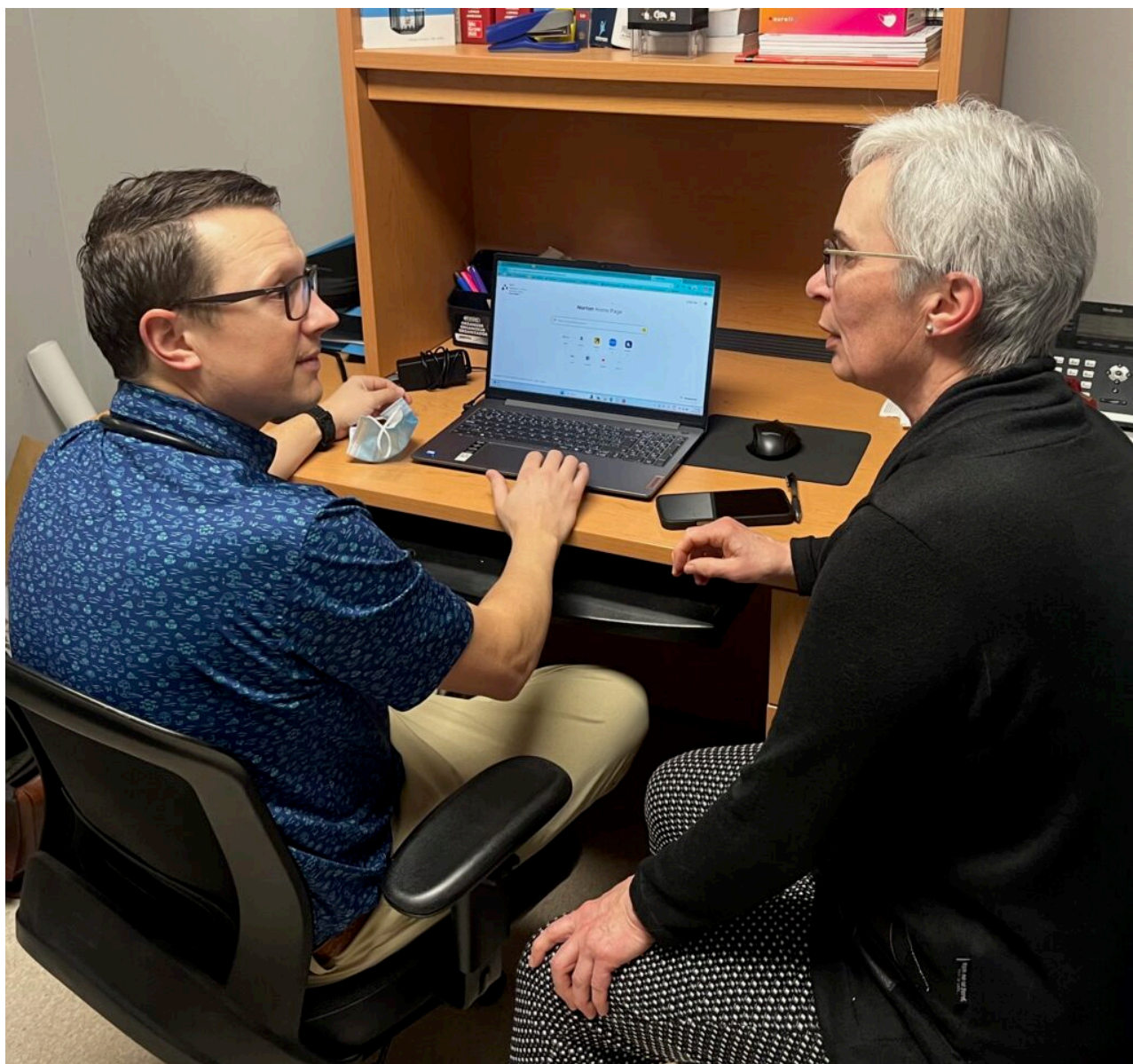
Crawford says her colleagues were excited about the award and honoured to play a role at the health centre.

“We’re trying to put rural on the map and it’s not just about Sundre, it’s about rural in general. We really want to make sure that rural is heard, and that our communities are heard, and our healthcare system is heard.

“So, when an award is given out, it makes the whole staff proud to be in this area and proud to be accountable for all the excellent things we’re doing.”

Dr. Lavoie, who was nominated by a former Rural Integrated Community Clerkship student and backed by her colleagues, says it was a nice farewell as she stepped away from her work as an anesthesiologist at the hospital.

“It made me understand or realize what a great bunch of people I’ve worked with over the years, and that’s what makes the difference. That’s what has kept me working, basically.”



Dr. Cecile Lavoie, recipient of the RhPAP's 2026 Rhapsody Physician Award, confers with Dr. Albert De Ridder Harmse. Dr. Lavoie says her colleagues are a huge part of her success as a rural physician. — Photo supplied by Dr. Cecile Lavoie

Both recipients were treated to special dinners in their communities and received \$1,250 to put toward a community charity of their choice.

In Bonnyville, Dr. Lavoie contributed to the local food bank, while Crawford donated her money to the Sundre Hospital Futures Foundation, an organization that helps fund equipment and other local health initiatives.

“We’re really trying to work towards a new campus of care, not just a hospital,” says Crawford.

“My ultimate goal is to have world-renowned rural patient care and education out here and start that movement where you don’t need to be in a big urban centre to experience that as a student, as staff, and also for patients.”

“When you come through that door, you know that your team is highly qualified and is working across the board with all disciplines to make your care the best it is.”

Send in a nomination today to celebrate rural Alberta healthcare heroes. Nominations for the [2026 Rhapsody Awards](#) close Feb. 27.