



A Southern Alberta medical student is passionate about promoting the virtues of a rural career as he traverses his own journey.

Nathan Van Decker, one of eight children, is used to helping out. Now in his second year of medicine, he sees great potential in helping high school students navigate their academic journey with an emphasis on returning to rural life after they graduate.

Van Decker knows rural life well. He grew up in communities north and east of Calgary including Kathryn, Beiseker, and now his home base, Strathmore.

The University of Alberta student, who serves as lead for the Rural Medicine Interest Group at the university, was recently awarded an RhPAP Rural Medical Student Award.

The award provides a one-time contribution of \$5,000 to assist with the student's tuition, accommodation, living, and/or professional development expenses.

Van Decker looks forward to learning more about the challenges facing rural healthcare and attended the Rural and Remote Medicine Conference last year.

"This experience not only broadened my professional network but also deepened my

understanding of the challenges and opportunities in rural healthcare.

“I aim to leverage these connections to foster dialogue and drive sustainable actions that best support rural communities,” he wrote in his award application.

Last summer, Van Decker shadowed a lone physician on staff in the emergency department in Strathmore.

“The experience gave me valuable insight into the workflow of a rural emergency department and the complexities of managing a workspace with limited resources,” says Van Decker, who also spent time volunteering as an urgent care assistant in Airdrie.

Van Decker says his personal experience in helping his family care for two siblings with autism has taught him the value of rural community support.

“I aspire to give back by addressing needs similar to those my family has faced,” he explains.

“I am genuinely excited about the future of rural medicine in Alberta and look forward to continuing to support initiative that improve the lives and livelihoods of those in rural communities.”

[Check out the 2026 RHPAP Medical Student Award recipients here.](#)