



COMMUNITY UPDATE

The latest from Northern Health

February 2024

Welcome to the Northern Health community update! Stay connected as we bring you monthly updates and valuable insight into health care in the North.

Organization and community news

Northern Health's strategy for sexual and reproductive health: Share your voice

Have you heard? Northern Health is creating its very first sexual and reproductive health strategy. The strategy will support local health care teams to strengthen the services they provide to folks in Northern BC. Wondering how you can get involved? [Read more on our stories website!](#)

Northern Health Lab Outpatient Improvement Project wins BC Quality Award

The Northern Health Lab Outpatient Improvement Project (LOIP) has been awarded the BC Quality Award for [Excellence in Quality: Strengthening Health & Wellness by Health Quality BC](#) (HQBC).

The LOIP was launched with a goal to address long wait times for accessing outpatient lab services throughout Northern BC. Through LOIP, NH labs began offering a blended service model of scheduled and unscheduled lab appointments. With this model, patients can self-schedule either online using the [HealthElife](#) portal or by phone. [Read more on our stories website!](#)

January 2024 Mills Memorial Hospital Replacement Project Update

Hot off the press! Check out the [January 2024 update](#) for the Mills Memorial Hospital (MMH) Replacement project in Terrace. Here's a snapshot what we're sharing this month:

- Virtual tours (videos) of the inside of the new hospital and Seven Sisters
- MMH stories and memories
- What a new hospital in Terrace means for surrounding communities

For more info about the project, visit [Let's Talk MMH](#)

The benefits of a new hospital in one community expand beyond that facility. A new hospital in one community benefits the entire region. [Learn more](#) about how the new Mills Memorial Hospital in Terrace will help improve patient care throughout Northwest BC.

Dawson Creek & District Hospital Replacement Project

The [January 2024 quarterly update](#) is now available on [Let's Talk DCDH!](#) Read the full update to learn about the progress being made on the construction of the new hospital, upcoming exciting milestones, and engagement initiatives. Other exciting news includes [employment opportunities with Northern Health](#) at the current and future hospital as well as the [DCDH construction camera](#), which is available any day, any time.

With an investment value of approximately \$590 million, the [DCDH Replacement Project is ranked #92](#) on the [2024 Top100 Canada's Biggest Infrastructure Projects Report](#). This annual report is published by [ReNew Canada](#), an infrastructure magazine that ranks and profiles the country's largest public infrastructure projects.

Province of BC funds consultation on Northern centre of excellence for children, youth

Northern Health President and CEO Ciro Panessa joined Premier David Eby, Chief Dolleen Logan of Lheidli T'enneh First Nation, and various partners Tuesday as the Premier announced a consultation and engagement process that will help design and plan programs and services for a proposed regional centre in Prince George to help children and youth thrive. For more information, [read the full release](#).

Appropriate use of the emergency department and options for accessing health care

Emergency rooms in the North are under increasing strain. Help take the pressure off the doctors and nurses that serve our communities by seeking care through these options, when you can:

- Call your family care provider
- Visit an urgent primary care centre or primary care clinic if one is available in your community
- Check out [HealthLinkBC.ca](#) or speak to a nurse at 8-1-1
- Talk to your local pharmacist about their expanded services [Book an appointment with a pharmacist](#).
- Book an appointment with the [Northern Health Virtual Clinic](#) at 1-844-645-7811
- Call 1-855-344-3800 to book an appointment with the [First Nations Virtual Doctor of the Day](#)

For life-threatening emergencies like chest pains, difficulty breathing, broken bones, or severe bleeding, the ER is the place to be. Call 9-1-1 for transport to your nearest available and appropriate facility. For more information, please visit our [service interruptions page](#).

Respiratory illness season continues

Healthy habits can help protect you, your loved ones, and your communities.

- Stay up to date with your flu and COVID-19 vaccines
- Stay home if you're sick
- Clean your hands well and often
- Wear a mask if you have cold/flu symptoms or are getting over an illness
- Cover your coughs and sneezes

Vaccines are free and available at pharmacies, health authority clinics, and some primary-care providers' offices. Register and book through the Get Vaccinated system at getvaccinated.gov.bc.ca or call 1-833-838-2323 to schedule an appointment. For more information, visit: <http://northernhealth.ca>

Northern Health Stories highlights

The [Northern Health Stories site](#) is a great place to read about what's going on in Northern Health – people, places, projects, and more! Here are some recent highlights:

- [WHO declares loneliness a “global public health concern”](#)
- [Improvements to Chetwynd General Hospital's lab help support better patient care](#)
- [Dr. Natasha DeSousa joins prestigious emergency leadership program](#)
- [Active Communities Grant helps Tumbler Ridge improve access to its world-class geological park](#)
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- [Come for the experience, stay for the supportive work environment!](#)
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- [Helping tired parents: Ways you can support their self-care after baby arrives](#)
- [“Your gift is life changing”: NICU nurses thank Northern human milk donors](#)
- [Take part in the 24-hour smoke break challenge: Weedless Wednesday!](#)
- [Northern Health's strategy for sexual and reproductive health: Share your voice](#)
- [A new baby can bring joy – and anxiety, depression, and sadness](#)

Ministry of Health highlights

Including highlights from the [Ministry of Health](#) and [Ministry of Mental Health & Addictions](#) that are of interest to all BC residents:

- [New self-screening program will help detect cervical cancer sooner](#)
- [Access to HPV vaccine expanded to males born in 2005](#)
- [Vaccines providing better protection still available in B.C.](#)
- [B.C. funds consultation on northern centre of excellence for children, youth](#)

Health Human Resources (HHR)

The items in this Health Human Resources (HHR) section highlight some of NH's efforts to strengthen health care in the North by improving staff recruitment and retention as part of [BC's Health Human Resources Strategy](#).

Physician Recruitment launches new jobsite

NH Physician Recruitment (NHPR) has launched a new and improved jobsite! NHPR will have more control over their postings, and interested physicians will have more search options and an easier way to apply! Check the site out here: [Job Search | Physician Jobs](#)

Shining a light on 2023 successes

Northern Health knows there is a long way to go before our staffing shortage is solved; however, we also want to celebrate some accomplishments from 2023. The progress highlighted here only scratches the surface of what Northern Health, the Province of BC, and other partners have worked on over the last year [in support of the provincial Health Human Resources Strategy](#).



Northern Health has also:

- Added housing units for health care workers in Valemount and Vanderhoof.
- Added 84 childcare spaces for health workers' children across the region.
- Adopted virtual profession-specific job fairs to assist with recruitment.

On top of the Health Career Accesses Program (HCAP), we have partnered with more post-secondary institutions to increase the number of programs/ professions:

Program / profession	Post-secondary institution	Details
Medical lab assistant	Thompson River University	7 grads in 2023
Rehab assistants	Capilano University	5 grads starting in May 2024
Combined laboratory X-ray technologist	Northern Alberta Institute of Technology	5 NH employees in program
Mental health support workers	University of Vancouver Island	Funding approved for 15 training seats in 2024
Indigenous-specific health care assistants	Native Education College & Thompson River University	2 First Nations communities included

Public Health

More than 2,500 lives lost to toxic drugs in 2023

Preliminary reporting released by the BC Coroners Service confirms that toxic, unregulated drugs claimed the lives of at least 2,511 people in British Columbia in 2023, the largest number of drug-related deaths ever reported to the agency.

“Tragically, toxic, illicit drugs are continuing to cause unprecedented numbers of deaths across our province,” said Lisa Lapointe, Chief Coroner. “This crisis, driven primarily by unregulated fentanyl, has cost our province dearly in the loss of much-loved and valued members of our communities. We cannot bring our deceased loved ones back, but we can and must do much more to protect the lives of tens of thousands of our family members, friends and colleagues still at risk.” [Read more from this news release.](#)

Minister’s statement on lives lost to poisoned drugs in 2023

Jennifer Whiteside, Minister of Mental Health and Addictions, has released a statement regarding the BC Coroners Service year-end report on illicit drug toxicity deaths. [Read that statement here.](#)

PHO recommends prescribed safer supply policy continue

A report released by Dr. Bonnie Henry, British Columbia’s Provincial Health Officer (PHO), provides a review of the provincial prescribed safer supply (PSS) policy and makes recommendations aimed at improving the lives of people who use drugs in BC and supporting clinicians in this work. [Read more.](#)

Toxic Drug Alert: Prince George – January 10, 2024

There has been an increase in overdoses in the community of **Prince George** linked to dark purple drug sold as “down.” This substance is causing slow, irregular breathing needing naloxone despite being awake. Individuals are requiring continued monitoring and encouragement to breathe.

Population & Public Health has issued a toxic drug alert for the community of **Prince George**. Please distribute broadly to those who would benefit from this information.

For more information, [visit our website](#). To sign up for text-based drug alerts for Northern Health and other health regions, text JOIN to 253787

Position on Homelessness, Equity, and Health

In October 2021, the Health Officers Council of BC declared homelessness an urgent public health crisis, forming a working group. By May 2022, the group presented a draft paper and surveyed members, finding unanimous support for advocating, managing diseases, and providing care for the homeless. Recognizing housing and homelessness as critical public health issues in BC, the council aims to highlight their interconnectedness with equity and health. Their position paper aims to raise awareness, set advocacy foundations, clarify roles, and offer human-rights-centered recommendations. The HOC expects a thorough provincial inquiry into data, leveraging evidence for lasting change while respecting Indigenous rights and acknowledging historical harms. Access the [position paper](#) here.

Overdose prevention and response

Understanding Prolonged Sedation and How to Respond

The unregulated drug supply, containing unknown and harmful substances, often includes opioids like fentanyl, possibly contaminated with stimulants, fillers, and other unexpected elements. Sedatives found in these substances can intensify sedation, leading to prolonged unresponsiveness, a condition not reversible with naloxone. Benzos or xylazine, among others, may be present in BC's unregulated drug supply, causing people to become unresponsive. Educate yourself on how to [respond to prolonged sedation](#) and [learn more](#) about this topic.

Prepare for extreme cold weather: A guide for housing service providers

Toward the Heart has a comprehensive guide for housing service providers which focuses on preparing for extreme cold weather and its detrimental health effects. The guide highlights critical health risks during cold weather for vulnerable groups, including people who are unhoused, those who use substances, the elderly, and those with specific health conditions. It highlights potential health effects including hypothermia, frostbite, and exacerbation of chronic conditions.

Emphasizing housing service providers' role in protecting at-risk populations, it strongly encourages actions such as accepting clients during extreme weather, following disease prevention recommendations, and seeking emergency medical help if needed. The full document can be accessed [here](#). Additionally, for specific information on naloxone and its reactions at different temperatures, refer to this [document](#).

Take-Home Naloxone in BC Infographic

The BCCDC has recently updated the data on the distribution of take-home naloxone kits, displaying active distribution sites in BC, the yearly shipment count to these locations, and the number of reported kits uses to reverse toxic drug poisoning. You can access the take-home naloxone in BC infographic by clicking [here](#).