



COMMUNITY UPDATE

The latest from Northern Health

March 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

New, bigger mental health facility opens in Terrace

People with serious mental health challenges in Terrace and the surrounding communities are benefiting from better care at the new Seven Sisters facility at Mills Memorial Hospital.

“People living with ongoing mental-health challenges need dedicated care in a space equipped to meet their daily needs as they work on their long-term recovery,” said Jennifer Whiteside, Minister for Mental Health and Addictions. “This newly expanded facility in Terrace will benefit patients, families, and the entire community by helping more people get the help they need to lead their best lives.” [Read more.](#)

NH Tracks is now available at the Kitimat General Hospital & Health Centre

Have you heard of NH Tracks? It's now available at the Kitimat General Hospital and Health Centre!

Northern Health (NH) Tracks is an online service that helps you get updates on your loved ones as they go through the stages of surgery while in hospital.

Help spread the word about this digital health tool. Tell your friends, family, and patients about NH Tracks if it's available in your community. Learn more about the benefits of NH Tracks and which sites it's available [on our website.](#)

Stuart Lake Hospital Replacement Project

Construction on the new Stuart Lake Hospital has progressed over the winter months, and the exterior is nearly complete! Development activities have now shifted primarily to interior work. [Northern Health President and CEO Ciro Panessa visited the Fort St. James site and checked out the newly-mounted exterior cladding.](#)

Want to see the progress for yourself? This [time-lapse video from our construction camera](#) shows just how far the project has come since 2022! For more project updates, visit [Let's Talk SLH](#).

Dawson Creek & District Hospital Replacement project update

The project recently reached another exciting milestone with the first concrete pour for the Level 1 (L1) suspended slab! The remaining pours for L1 will continue until mid-April, Level 2 is anticipated to occur from March to May and Level 3 is anticipated from April to July. [Read more](#) about the installation process for the suspended slabs and concrete superstructure.

On February 22 and 29, members from the DCDH project team, the Design-Builder which includes Graham Design Builders LP and HDR Architecture, and subcontractor representatives attended an in-person mock-up review of a typical multi-trade rack (MTR) in Coquitlam to provide feedback and discuss the pre-fabrication design. [Learn more](#) about what an MTR is and how they'll be incorporated into the new DCDH.

The two tower cranes on the site of the new hospital were recently given names by Ken, a registered nurse at the current DCDH. As a Vancouver Canucks super-fan, Ken named the cranes Hank and Dan because they mirror the hard work and dedication of Canucks legends Henrik and Daniel Sedin. Have you thought of a fun and creative name for the cranes? [Share your comment](#).

Métis sash unveilings in Smithers area facilities

Métis sashes were installed in Bulkley Lodge on February 2 and in Bulkley Valley Hospital on February 12. The framed sashes were donated by Susie Hooper on behalf of Métis Nation British Columbia and provides awareness of Métis Peoples, the Tri-River Métis Association, and the importance of the sash in Métis culture. [Read more](#).

Early vision care is important for children between ages 6 months to five years

Healthy eyes and good vision are an important part of children's development. [BC Doctors of Optometry](#) (eye doctors) recommend that children have:

- At least one eye exam between ages 6 months to 1 year **and** between two to five years.
- Yearly exams while in school (covered by [BC's medical services plan](#) until 18 years of age, but there may be a small fee charged by the optometrist).
- If parents have questions or concerns about their child's eye health, please encourage them to connect with an optometrist: [Find a doctor | BC Doctors of Optometry](#).

Information for families:

- Health file: [Young children and their vision | HealthLink BC](#)
- Health file: [Elementary school age children and their vision | HealthLink BC](#)

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](https://www.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: 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:

- [Northern Health Lab Outpatient Improvement Project wins BC Quality Award](#)
- [Northern Health's strategy for sexual and reproductive health: Share your voice](#)
- [Come for the rural practice opportunity, stay for the growth and development!](#)
- [Breast screening detects cancers earlier: One patient's story](#)
- [Qualitycast North: Playing hide and seek with the appendix](#)
- [New and different experiences as an employed student nurse](#)
- [Orientation a navigational tool for new NH social workers: Meet Hank Lukyn](#)
- [Upgraded medical imaging services for the Dawson Creek & District Hospital](#)

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:

- **Budget 2024:** [Taking action for people, families in B.C.](#)
- **MMHA:** [Youth benefit from significant increase in mental-health, addiction care](#) (New Foundry Centres are coming to Quesnel, and to Vanderhoof)
- **MoH:** [New compensation model connects more people to primary care](#)
- **MMHA:** [Minister's statement on B.C. decriminalization one-year anniversary](#)

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](#).

Province announces minimum nurse-to-patient ratios, retention and recruitment investments

The Province and BC Nurses' Union have made significant progress determining minimum nurse-to-patient ratios. This progress is supported by a \$237-million investment to help retain the nurses BC has now, return nurses back to the bedside and recruit the nurses BC needs for the future. [Learn more](#).

GoHealth BC provides 250,000 hours of nursing support

[GoHealth BC](#) has reached an exciting milestone in providing nursing support for BC's rural and remote communities! Since the start of the program, GoHealth BC nurses have provided 250,000 hours of nursing support in locations where it's most needed.

Thanks to everyone who has helped spread the word about this program and the nurses who travel far and wide to help provide support in some of BC's most remote health care facilities. [Read more on our Stories website](#).

Recruitment Virtual Hiring Event: Respiratory Therapists

NH Recruitment hosted a virtual hiring event focussed on respiratory therapists in February. At the event, recruiters connected with applicants interested in working in our region.

Recruiters on the road

NH recruiters travelled far and wide this February, trekking as close as Kamloops and reaching as [far as Halifax NS!](#)

Public Health

Minister's statement on lives lost to poisoned drugs in January

Jennifer Whiteside, Minister of Mental Health and Addictions, has released a statement regarding the BC Coroners Service report on illicit drug toxicity deaths in January. [Read the statement on the Government of BC website](#).

Nearly 200 British Columbians lost to toxic drugs in January 2024

The ongoing drug toxicity public-health emergency continues to devastate

communities throughout British Columbia, with at least 198 deaths suspected to have been caused by toxic, unregulated drugs reported to the BC Coroners Service in January 2024.

[Read the information bulletin from BC Coroners Service here.](#)

Ministry of Health advises to check immunization records before travelling

With measles outbreaks being reported internationally and spring break on the horizon, the provincial health officer, BC Centre for Disease Control and public health officials are reminding people in British Columbia to check their vaccination records before travelling to ensure they are protected. [Read more from the ministry announcement.](#)

For more information on measles in Northern BC, [visit our website.](#)

Overdose prevention and response

Reflecting on One Year of BC's Decriminalization

Minister Jennifer Whiteside marks BC's one-year decriminalization milestone, highlighting a shift towards viewing substance use as a health matter rather than treating it as a criminal issue. The minister emphasized the complex nature of this public-health crisis, confirming a commitment to implement a diverse set of strategies. This involves investing in early intervention and prevention, broadening access to harm-reduction, enhancing medication-assisted treatments, and expanding treatment and recovery services to ensure better availability of care. For more details, read the full article [here](#).

In line with the wider provincial policy change, Northern Health proactively appointed key positions, executed a comprehensive communication plan, adapted existing policies, and is actively involving people with lived and living experience of substance use. This reflects a notable transformation in healthcare approach.

First Nations Health Authority (FNHA) Toxic Drug Emergency Community Support Guide

Access the guide [here](#) for more details on FNHA's response and areas of support within the toxic drug emergency. In addressing the crisis, First Nations people in BC face disproportionate toxic drug poisoning events and deaths due to the ongoing legacy of colonialism. Despite these challenges, communities demonstrate resilience in their healing approaches. FNHA works hand-in-hand with BC First Nation individuals, families, and communities, providing culturally safe and trauma-informed support.

To address this crisis, FNHA has developed provincial and regional strategies for timely and effective harm reduction programming. Communities are urged to identify gaps through regional communication pathways, and FNHA commits to address these gaps within its capacity. Additionally, FNHA actively advocates for more resources, collaborating with government and non-government partners. This guide outlines the FNHA's areas of support within the toxic drug emergency response, adapting as the situation unfolds.