



COMMUNITY UPDATE

The latest from Northern Health

January 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

Strengthened and updated Northern Health Strategic Plan – Looking to 2025

We are pleased to introduce the refreshed [Northern Health Strategic Plan – Looking to 2025](#), which was approved by the Northern Health Board on December 11, 2023.

Please visit our new [webpage](#) that features the Strategic Plan and downloadable pdf, and includes the work we've done to showcase, via the links to our Story Site, how we live the Values and Strategic Priorities.

2024 New Year's babies in the Northern Health region (updated January 2)

Every New Year's Day, Northern Health monitors its hospitals and labour and delivery units for the birth of New Year's babies across the region. [Read more on our website](#) to learn about the New Year's Day babies in the North!

Expression of Interest for community-based HIV and HCV services in Northern BC are now available on BC Bid

Northern Health is requesting for Expression of Interest from non-profit community and First Nations health organizations to provide services that will increase access to HIV and HCV supports across the North. **The funding is available to provide services over a 3-year period** from April 1, 2024 – March 31, 2027.

For details check [BC Bid](#) (Opportunity ID: 187084).

St. John Hospital deconstruction begins to make way for integrated primary, community care facility in Vanderhoof

On January 3, deconstruction of the St. John Hospital in Vanderhoof began to clear the way for a new Primary and Community Care Facility for the region. We ask that residents please stay clear of the construction site and remain behind the construction fencing while work is ongoing. Services at St. John Hospital will continue as normal during this work.

If you have stories to share about the old St. John Hospital, and would like to submit them for inclusion in a legacy project for the community, please email letstalk@northernhealth.ca.

More details about the new facility can be found [here](#).

Share your fondest memory of Mills Memorial Hospital in Terrace!

Over the past 80 years, Mills Memorial Hospital has been part of many families' stories – stories of joy, hope, loss, and change. As we look forward to the new hospital in Terrace, we want to celebrate special moments that occurred at MMH.

Help us honour the hospital and all those who have worked and received care there by [sharing your story](#)! Share one of your fondest memories or what you will miss most. Share a sentence or a whole page. It's up to you.

Go to [Let's Talk MMH](#) for more info and how to submit.

Bonus! All those who submit a story before January 31, 2024 will be entered into a draw for one of ten \$20 Tim Hortons gift cards!

Dawson Creek & District Hospital Replacement Project

Interested in learning more about what the current Dawson Creek & District Hospital has in comparison to what the new hospital will have? [Check out this infographic](#) that compares the facility sizes, treatment spaces, programming and services, inpatient beds, and parking spaces!

Active Communities Grants available

Thanks to an investment in physical activity by the Ministry of Health, the BC Alliance for Healthy Living has launched a new cycle of [Active Communities](#) grants. **Local and Indigenous governments are invited to apply for up to \$50,000** to support projects and programs that increase access to physical activity in their communities. With a longer application window, now is a great time to form or build on partnerships that can really make a difference in your community! **Application Deadline: February 5, 2024**

Vision Zero in Road Safety Grant Opportunity

Do you know of a road safety champion in your community? Share the news that the **British Columbia Vision Zero in Road Safety Grant Program** opened grant funding to local governments, Indigenous community governments, and non-government organizations to directly support road safety projects in community. The goal of the program is to prevent injuries for vulnerable road users such as people who walk, cycle, or wheel in our

communities. Indigenous community governments are invited to submit applications for the road safety projects that best suit their needs.

Application closing date: January 15, 2024. Grant projects are funded between \$5,000 and \$20,000 depending on the project. For more information visit visionzerobc.ca.

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://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>

National Ribbon Skirt Day – January 4, 2024

January 4 is National Ribbon Skirt Day. This day was recognized as an Act of Parliament on December 15, 2022, to honour the bravery of Isabella Kulak who was shamed for wearing her ribbon skirt to school.

National Ribbon Skirt Day is an opportunity to spark conversations among people, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike, about working towards reconciliation and continue the healing journey in Canada.

To learn more about National Ribbon Skirt Day, visit the [Government of Canada website](#). Want to learn even more? Read the [Statement by the Prime Minister on National Ribbon Skirt Day](#)

The power of everyone: International Volunteer Day

December 5 is International Volunteer Day (IVD). This special day is led by the United Nations to promote the work of volunteers at all levels from local to international. This year, the United Nations marks IVD by recognizing ‘the power of collective action: if everyone did.’

At Northern Health, volunteers are involved all across our region in many different ways, from enriching the lives of seniors in care to undertaking vital fundraising efforts, and we thank volunteers everywhere for their commitment to making their communities stronger and healthier.

In addition, volunteerism is often a first step to becoming a health care worker or staff member. This week, we [share one staff member’s journey from volunteer to Executive Director](#).

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:

- [Dried blood spot testing: An easier way to test for certain infections](#)
- [Holiday giving: Thinking outside the \(gift\)box](#)
- [Stuart Nechako Manor recreation bus – adventure awaits!](#)
- [Diabetes: More than just blood sugar](#)
- [Ceremony offers comfort to long-term care home community in Prince Rupert](#)
- [Talking screening mammography with Dr. Karen Seland](#)
- [Change is tough, but so are we: Reflections on the new SaferCare Capacity Management system at UHNBC](#)
- [Holiday donations: How can you best support your local food bank?](#)
- [From volunteer to career: Celebrating International Volunteer Day](#)
- [Northern BC Research and Quality Conference 2023 – Looking to the Future: Health in the North](#)
- [Upgraded pharmacy services for DCDH and FSJH](#)
- [Quesnel benefiting from 24/7 availability of home support](#)
- [Recognizing leadership and advocacy in harm reduction: Reanne Sanford](#)
- [Spotlight on our people: Patty Poudrier, GoHealth BC travel nurse](#)
- [Staying safe and celebrating responsibly: Enjoying the holidays with cannabis in mind](#)
- [Improvements to Chetwynd General Hospital’s lab help support better patient care](#)
- [WHO declares loneliness a “global public health concern”](#)

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:

- [300,000 have received free contraceptives, expanded pharmacist care](#)
- [Immunizations will help keep people safer this holiday season](#)
- [Mental-health, substance-use supports available during holiday season](#)

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](#).

NH in-house security program launches in Terrace and Prince Rupert

In September, the [first "class" of Northern Health Relational Security Officers](#) (RSOs) officially completed their training at the University Hospital of Northern BC (UHNBC) in Prince George.

In October, Mills Memorial Hospital (MMH) in Terrace and Prince Rupert Regional Hospital (PRRH) saw their own "first classes" of RSOs complete their training and begin their new roles at the two hospitals. [Read more on our stories site](#).

GoHealth BC: Supporting nursing in BC's rural and remote communities

You may have noticed that the Northern Health Travel Resource Program is going by a new name: GoHealth BC. The program has expanded and is starting to provide services to rural and remote communities all over BC.

How does GoHealth BC support NH staff in our rural and remote communities?

[GoHealth BC](#) is different from travel nursing agencies because all of the program's nurses are Northern Health employees. This means that they are paid the same as regular/full-time nurses, are part of the BC Nurse's Union, and are required to have all the same training completed prior to their first day. [Read more](#).

Virtual hiring event success

NH Recruitment is excited to be able to host virtual hiring events through our [NH's Indeed account](#)! We recently piloted a one-day virtual hiring event featuring opportunities for mental health and addictions clinicians. The event was a full day of virtual meetings hosted by two NH recruiters. The turnout and results were fantastic:

- 82 RSVPs
- 49 attendees
- 24 candidates flagged for follow-up
- 4 hires and counting!

Future events will be found on our [NH Indeed page](#) and promoted through our social channels.

Check out NH's new recruitment ad

To help fill roles that don't provide direct care, we're running a new, recruitment-focused TV commercial in several communities in the NH region. [Check it out!](#)

Peace River Regional District scholarships – now open!

The Peace River Regional District, in partnership with Northern Health, supports residents with opportunities to begin or continue a career in health care. If you're interested in starting or continuing your career in health care, you may be eligible for up to \$3000 in scholarship funds! [Read more about eligibility and how to apply.](#)

Province releases one-year update of BC's HHR Strategy

“More people are getting care faster and closer to home, and the health-care workforce is better supported as the Province makes significant progress on expanding the health-care workforce and strengthening B.C.’s public health-care system.”

- [Read the one-year update.](#)
- [Read the news release.](#)

Province releases Allied Health Strategic Plan

“The Province continues to put people first by launching the new [Allied Health Strategic Plan](#), which focuses on recruitment, retention, training and redesigning of the allied health workforce, to ensure people have access to the health-care providers they need.”

- [Read the news release.](#)

Public Health

Syphilis rates on the rise in the North

Did you know syphilis rates are on the rise in the North? We are seeing cases of syphilis in both men and women, and all sexual orientations, in the North. From 2021 to 2022, syphilis cases in the North increased by 5 times - from 8.6 to 43.5 cases per 100,000. Visit <http://smartsexresource.com> to find a STI testing location near you.

Winter wellness – taking care of your mental health

Winter means shorter, darker days, and a lack of daylight can have a negative impact on your mental health.

Check in with yourself and with loved ones this season to [support their winter wellness.](#)

BC Coroner’s report – October 2023

BC Summary

- At least 2,039 lives were lost to unregulated drugs in the first 10 months of 2023, according to preliminary data released by the BC Coroners Service. The rate of unregulated drug deaths in BC is 45.3 deaths per 100,000 individuals in 2023.
- The number of unregulated drug deaths in October 2023 equated to about 6.1 deaths per day.

Trends

- Smoking was the most common mode of consumption in 2023 with 65% showing evidence of smoking followed by injection (14%), nasal insufflation (14%), and oral (4%)

- In 2023, 80% of unregulated drug deaths occurring inside (private residences, other inside residence including social and supportive housing, SROs, shelters, and hotels etc.) and 19% occurring outside in vehicles, sidewalks, streets, parks etc.
- There is no indication that prescribed safe supply is contributing to unregulated drug deaths.

Northern Health Summary

- In 2023, NH has the highest rate of unregulated drug deaths in the province with a rate of 61.4 deaths per 100,000 individuals (N=157).
- In October 2023, the rate of unregulated drug deaths was 4.2 per 100,000 (N=13).
 - The Northwest has seen 36 unregulated drug deaths in 2023 for a rate of 55.2 deaths per 100,000 individuals. This is the **eighth highest** rate in BC.
- October 2023 there were 3 unregulated drug death: rate of 3.8 deaths per 100,000 individuals.
 - The Northern Interior has seen 103 unregulated drug deaths in 2023 for a rate of 79.8 deaths per 100,000 individuals. This is the **second highest** rate in BC.
- October 2023 there were 8 unregulated drug deaths: rate of 5.2 deaths per 100,000 individuals.
 - The Northeast has seen 18 unregulated drug deaths in 2023 for a rate of 29.4 deaths per 100,000 individuals. This is the **fourth lowest** rate in BC.
- October 2023 there were 2 unregulated drug deaths: rate of 2.7 deaths per 100,000 individuals.

Overdose prevention and response

Naloxone and cold weather

It can save lives to carry naloxone, but with temperatures dropping, it's important to ensure that it is stored correctly. While studies have shown that naloxone can stay stable at temperatures as low as -20 for up to 2 weeks, it is always advisable to reduce exposure to freezing temperatures for extended periods of time.

What to do when the weather turns cold:

- Avoid leaving naloxone in a car for extended periods of time. Take it inside or carry it with you.
- When carrying it with you, keep it close to your body (in a pocket or under your jacket).
- Know where to get a new naloxone kit if you're worried that yours has been exposed to freezing temperatures.
- If the only naloxone available to respond to an overdose may have been exposed to the cold, use it anyway! While it may not be as effective and require more than one dose, it's better than not using any.

See [Naloxone and temperature](#) for more information.