



COMMUNITY UPDATE

The latest from Northern Health

August/September 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.

Helpful wildfire resources

Wildfire season continues in our region and we have compiled a list of resources to help you stay informed and prepared:

- [Northern Health – Wildfires and your health](#)
- [Extreme heat and heat warnings](#)
- [Wildfire preparedness](#)
- [Latest air quality advisories](#)
- [BC Wildfire fire list](#)
- [Emergency Info BC Advisories](#)
- [Heat Warning in BC](#)
- [Disaster stress](#)
- [BCCDC – Wildfire smoke](#)
- [FireSmoke Canada – BC smoke forecasts](#)
- [Recover after a wildfire – Re-entering your home or business](#)

Wildfire smoke information

Poor air quality can be harmful to health, especially for those with chronic conditions like asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), heart disease, diabetes, and for pregnant people, infants and children, and older adults.

Take steps to keep you and your loved ones safe and healthy:

- Reduce the amount of time spent outdoors
- Stay hydrated
- Avoid rigorous outdoor activities, like exercise
- Keep windows closed in vehicles and homes

- If you have one, use an indoor air cleaner or filtration system, or recirculate indoor air in a forced air system that is filtered (turn on your furnace fan)

For more information on how to stay safe in smoky conditions visit the [BCCDC Wildfire Smoke page](#).

Staying informed during an emergency

When emergencies happen, people need up-to-date information. The newly designed [EmergencyInfoBC](#) website shares this information in one place so it's easy to access on a computer or phone.

New features include the latest evacuation alerts and orders at the top, an interactive map, and links to other resources that will help you prepare for an emergency. You can also share information directly from the website to Facebook or X. By sharing from the website, you can be sure it's verified and up-to-date.

Visit <https://EmergencyInfoBC.ca> now, before you need it, so you know where to look in case of an emergency.

Organization and community news

National Day for Truth and Reconciliation (NDTR) is September 30

NDTR honours history and healing together and aims to acknowledge the painful truths of historical injustices and mistreatment of Indigenous peoples of Canada. This day also provides an opportunity for reflection, dialogue, and understanding between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities in the pursuit of healing and reconciliation.

In the lead up to NDTR, [learn more](#) about the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation's Survivor's flag.

New long-term care home coming to Quesnel

Seniors in Quesnel will have greater access to care closer to home with the approval of a new long-term care home, which will bring more than 220 new publicly funded beds to the community.

The new home will add 221 new beds and replace 67 beds from Dunrovin Park Lodge, for a total of 288 beds. The home will be located on land provided by the City of Quesnel. It will be built and operated by Providence Living in partnership with Northern Health under a project development agreement. Construction of the new facility is expected to begin in fall 2026 following the design phase and is expected to be ready for residents in late 2028. Read the rest of the news release on the [BC government website](#).

Mental health crisis team launches in Prince George

People experiencing a mental health or substance use crisis in Prince George will soon have access to a new community-led Peer Assisted Care Team (PACT) to help them stabilize and find the support they need.

“PACT provides immediate, compassionate help from those who have walked a similar path,” said Jennifer Whiteside, Minister of Mental Health and Addictions. “In Prince George, people in crisis will benefit from the support of skilled professionals and a person with lived experience who understands what they are going through. This approach ensures a more effective, sympathetic response that can make all the difference in a person’s recovery.” Read the rest of the [news release on our website](#).

New long-term care home coming to Smithers

Seniors in Smithers will have greater access to care closer to home with the approval of a new long-term care home, which will bring 160 new publicly funded beds to the community.

“The investment in the new long-term care homes in Smithers represents our government’s ongoing commitment to improving access to high-quality, compassionate care for seniors in British Columbia,” said Adrian Dix, Minister of Health. “This action represents a significant step forward in addressing the growing demand for long-term care and our government’s ongoing efforts to strengthen health care in rural and remote communities.” [Read the rest of the release on the BC government website](#).

GetCheckedOnline launches in Dawson Creek

Northern Health is excited to have GetCheckedOnline launch in Dawson Creek. This is the first Northern Health community to be a part of GetCheckedOnline, which is celebrating its 10th anniversary in 2024.

What is GetCheckedOnline? It’s a website service, provided by the BC Centre for Disease Control, that lets people test for sexually transmitted infections and HIV without having to visit a doctor or primary care provider. It’s free and confidential! [Read more about GetCheckedOnline on our website](#).

Work advances on expanding University Hospital of Northern BC

People in the North are one step closer to enhanced acute care and a dedicated cardiac unit with the approval of the business plan for a new patient-care tower at the University Hospital of Northern British Columbia (UHNBC).

“We know we have work ahead of us to make world-class acute care more accessible in the North and we’ll keep working to get the job done,” said Adrian Dix, Minister of Health. “Local leaders have identified the need to strengthen cardiac care and we’re taking action to build up state-of-the-art cardiac services close to home. As our population grows and ages, in Prince George and throughout the province, we’re investing in health care to meet current and future demand.” [Read more on our website](#).

New CT scanner to improve diagnostic imaging at Kitimat General Hospital

Residents of Kitimat and area will benefit from better access to diagnostic imaging services with the funding committed and the planning beginning for a new CT scanner at Kitimat General Hospital. “With meaningful community partnerships, people in Kitimat will be able to get the scans they need faster and closer to home,” said Adrian Dix, Minister of Health. “Adding a new CT scanner at the Kitimat General Hospital is part of the actions our government is taking to expand health services and ensure patients have access to necessary and life-saving care.”

This project represents a \$4.7 million capital investment into improving healthcare in Kitimat. The Kitimat Hospital Foundation has contributed \$2.4 million through community donors including LNG Canda, the Max Lange Foundation, the First West Foundation, the District of Kitimat, and many members of the community. [Read more on our website.](#)

New supportive homes, complex-care spaces coming to Prince George

People experiencing or at risk of homelessness in Prince George will soon have more safe and secure housing options as approximately 100 supportive homes and complex-care housing (CCH) units are on the way.

“We know that when people experiencing homelessness have stable housing with supports, they can start to rebuild healthier lives,” said Ravi Kahlon, Minister of Housing. “People with complex health issues overlapping with housing insecurity challenges are often caught up in a cycle of homelessness. These new homes, along with access to appropriate supports, will help enable them to move out of that cycle and re-establish stability in their lives.” [Read more from the Ministry of Health.](#)

Cathy Ulrich appointed to Order of British Columbia

Former CEO of Northern Health, Cathy Ulrich, will receive the highest honour one can achieve in the province of British Columbia. Ulrich is one of 12 people appointed to the Order of British Columbia this year. Ulrich retired last year after a 41-year career in health care, including 16 years as the president and CEO of Northern Health. Read the full story on the [Canadian Healthcare Technology website.](#)

Children aged 11 and younger can now be signed up for HealthElife

Parents and caregivers of children aged 0-11 can now request access to their minor’s HealthElife portal account. This gives the parent or caregiver direct access to the child’s health record and some health services such as booking a lab appointment.

Using HealthElife has benefits:

- Easy and secure access to your personal health information online
- Conveniently view and schedule your lab appointments
- Faster lab results and medical imaging reports including x-ray and ultrasound

Direct patients to sign up at: northernhealth.ca/healthelife.

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](#).

Have you heard about #SnapsByStaff?

Introducing #SnapsByStaff! Once a week we'll be sharing photos of our picturesque Northern BC communities taken by none other than our Northern Health staff members! For our first photo, we have a [beautiful Prince Rupert sunset](#) taken by Suraj Gopal, Relational Security Services Officer.

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](#).

Healthcare Travelling Roadshow

The [Healthcare Travelling Roadshow](#) recently travelled to Fort Nelson. It is a grassroots initiative to address workforce shortages in rural health care and the program was conceived at a 2009 event in Prince George. Health care students in post-secondary institutions travel to rural communities to showcase career opportunities to local high school students.

Recruiters on the road

NH's recruiters travelled all over this summer, speaking with health care professionals locally and across the country. Their travels included:

- National Emergency Nursing Association Conference - Quebec
- Medical Laboratory Association of Ontario 2024 Conference - Ontario
- International Congress of Nutrition and Dietetics – Toronto, ON
- Coast Mountain College Job Fair - Terrace, BC
- Labcon 2024 – St. John's, NL

- Smithers Community Services Association and WorkBC Event - Smithers
- University of British Columbia Rehab Job Fair – Vancouver, BC
- Gitwinksihlkw Career and Education Fair – Gitwinksihlkw, BC

To see highlights of these events and conferences, check out [Northern Health Careers](#).

Capital Projects

Mills Memorial Hospital Replacement Project

The project is moving smoothly ahead towards completion, and the excitement in Terrace is building! Our [latest quarterly report](#) covers recent milestones, a look at what's coming next, and some major new pieces of state-of-the-art equipment. We'll have more to share as we approach our opening date in late November. We're excited to bring this new hospital to the region, and for everyone to see this beautiful new facility.

Stuart Lake Hospital Replacement Project

We're in the final weeks of building the brand new hospital and health centre in Fort St. James! The Graham Design-Builder Team is putting the final touches on the facility before passing over the keys to Northern Health in October. We continue to work with our local partners to ensure we're ready to welcome patients to the facility in January 2025. Curious what the facility looks like now? [Check out the construction camera](#) for the most updated view.

Dawson Creek & District Hospital Replacement Project

There's a lot of exciting progress being made on the new hospital! The [July edition of the Quarterly Update](#) includes some of the recent milestones the project has achieved, details about operational readiness and transition planning, department highlights, and recent engagement initiatives. Want to see the progress being made on site? Check out the [August progress photos!](#)

We were thrilled to join forces with the Graham Design-Builder team to enter a [float in the Annual Fall Fair Parade!](#) This event was an amazing opportunity for us to get involved in the community and celebrate our shared commitment to improving health care in our region. Our float was centered around the new hospital and featured vibrant decorations and renderings.

We also recently celebrated [one-year of construction and our amazing staff!](#) In collaboration with local leadership, the DCDH Project Management Office hosted a lunch celebration for Hospital, Health Unit and Rotary Manor staff to commemorate this exciting milestone.

Department Highlight – Mental Health Unit

Mental health service delivery at the new hospital will be improved with a new inpatient suite and an increase of beds from 15 to 18, all of which are private rooms with ensuite washrooms. The unit is located on Level 3 and also includes two high observation rooms, a secure courtyard for access to the outdoors, family visiting and consult rooms, a patient lounge, dining room, and kitchen, laundry room, exercise room, group therapy room, and activity room. Visit Let's Talk DCDH to [learn more about the mental health unit](#).

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:

- [Qualitycast North: Ketamine Infusion Therapy featuring Dr. Darren Jakubec](#)
- [Commitment to continuing medical education – Terrace's first medical conference](#)
- [International Self-Care Day July 24, 2024](#)
- [\\$10,000 donation will have big impact on clinical education in the Northwest](#)
- [Qualitycast North: Mind space Building successful skills for wellbeing with Dr. Fiona Petigara](#)
- [Career growth in health care fills a need in Kitimat](#)
- [Enhancing seniors' lives with personalized connections: Mountainview Lodge's DementiAbility approach](#)
- [Culture is an entree, not a side dish: How cultural foods support health and wellness](#)
- [Cindy's story: Coming back from an addiction that almost took everything](#)

Ministry highlights

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

- [Provincial health officer's statement on ensuring children's vaccinations are up to date](#)
- [Expanded travel programs support cancer patients](#)
- [B.C. supports seniors aging at home with new virtual service](#)
- [New provincewide Opioid Treatment Access Line provides same-day access to care](#)
- [Minister's statement on lives lost to poisoned drugs in July](#)

Public Health

Northern Health Communities E-Brief – July 2024

The E-Brief is a monthly newsletter sharing resources, learning opportunities, and grant funding that supports community health in Northern BC. [Check out what's new for July 2024.](#)

To subscribe to this monthly newsletter, please email healthycommunities@northernhealth.ca with the subject line "subscribe."

Overdose prevention and response

Text alerts for toxic drugs available in the North

In response to the toxic drug emergency, a text message alert system was launched across Northern Health. The system sends text alerts with timely information and up-to-date resources to people who use drugs, those who support them, and community members. It's a public health measure to prevent drug poisonings and deaths and provides. Opt-in by texting **JOIN to ALERTS (253787)**. [More information.](#)

International Overdose Awareness Day 2024 - August 31

The BC Coroners Service confirms that toxic unregulated drugs claimed the lives of at least 2,511 British Columbians in 2023. In the eight years since April 2016, when a public health emergency was officially declared because of the soaring number of overdoses in BC, the lives of over 14,000 British Columbians have been tragically cut short.

Due to unregulated illicit substances, 14,000 families in British Columbia buried loved ones and struggled to pick up the pieces after losing a child, spouse, parent, or friend. The total number of lives lost in 2023 equates to an average of 6.9 deaths every single day. Overdose deaths have become the leading cause of death in British Columbia for people aged 10 to 59, accounting for more deaths than homicides, suicides, accidents, and natural diseases combined. [Read more on our website.](#)