



# COMMUNITY UPDATE

*The latest from Northern Health*

**December 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**

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### **Get prepared for winter weather and storms**

Severe weather like snow, hail, blizzards, high winds or heavy rain can happen without warning and can affect your safety in different ways. Extreme cold can be hazardous, and the risk increases the more time you spend outdoors.

Weather alerts and forecasts are issued by Environment Canada. For keeping up with extreme weather alerts:

- Follow [Canada public weather alerts](#)
- Download the [WeatherCAN](#) app to receive weather alert notifications in your area.
- Check out [DriveBC](#) for road conditions and alerts in your area

Visit the Government of BC website for resources on the following:

- [Know the risks](#)
- [As winter weather arrives](#)
- [Winter Driving](#)

### **New hospital in Terrace open for patients**

People in Terrace and surrounding areas now have access to the new state-of-the-art Ksyen Regional Hospital, which opened Sunday, Nov. 24, 2024.

"People in Terrace had been asking for an upgraded health-care facility for years, and our government recognized the need and took action to make sure it happened," said Josie Osborne, Minister of Health. "British Columbians deserve access to health care in modern, cutting-edge facilities and we are excited to be able to provide this to the community. We will continue to invest in capital health projects around the province."

The new hospital is more than twice the size of the previous facility and has 82 beds, private rooms, a bigger emergency department space, including two trauma bays, six stretcher bays, pediatric care space and four operating rooms, as well as the latest diagnostic imaging equipment.

For more info, read the full BC Gov news release: "[New hospital in Terrace open for patients](#)"

### **New Terrace hospital gifted Tsimshian name**

The new state-of-the-art hospital in Terrace has reached another important milestone as it has been gifted a Tsimshian name, Ksyen Regional Hospital, Terrace. The name recognizes the territory in which the hospital was built and the region it serves.

Local First Nations and municipal leaders had discussions together about the naming of the hospital. It was agreed that a Tsimshian name proposed by the Kitsumkalum First Nation would be the name submitted to be approved by the Northern Health Board of Directors and the Province. [Read more in our news release.](#)

### **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, then-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." [Read the rest of the news release on our website.](#)

### **New Fort St. James health facility nears completion**

People in Fort St. James will soon have enhanced access to high-quality health care as the new hospital and health centre nears substantial completion.

"With the substantial completion of the facility, people will be one step closer to an expanded emergency department, improved diagnostic imaging services and better access to primary care in their community," said Adrian Dix, then-Minister of Health. "This investment will also provide health-care professionals with the space and technology they need to provide more cutting edge care. Reaching this significant milestone will ensure people in the North have access to the care they need close to home, now and well into the future."

Patients will start receiving care in the new facility when it opens in January 2025. Demolition of the current hospital is anticipated to begin early in 2025, with full completion of the project expected in September 2025. For more info, read the full BC Gov news release: [New Fort St. James health facility nears completion.](#)

## 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](https://northernhealth.ca/healthelife).

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

Emergency rooms in the North can face increasing strain at this time of year. 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](#).

## 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](#).

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### Recruiters on the road

NH's staff and physician recruitment teams have been out in full swing this fall, sharing what kinds of opportunities set Northern BC apart. During October and November, the recruiters have attended or presented at:

- New Nursing Grad Recruitment Trip: VIU, UVIC, and North Island College – Nanaimo, BC
- Family Medicine Experience (FMX) Conference – Phoenix, Arizona
- Canadian Association of Critical Care Nurses Conference – Regina, SK

- Nurse Practitioner Association of Ontario – Toronto, ON
- St Paul's Emergency Medicine Conference – Whistler, BC
- American College of Emergency Physicians Annual Meeting – Las Vegas, Nevada
- BC Society for Medical Laboratory Science Congress – Victoria, BC
- Eastern Provinces Nursing Grad Roadshow – New Brunswick and Nova Scotia universities and colleges
- Vancouver Community College Pharmacy Tech Presentation – Vancouver, BC
- American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry – Seattle, Washington
- Grow Our Own – Shas Ti Kelly Road Secondary School – Prince George, BC
- American College of Gastroenterology Conference – Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
- BCIT and UBC Class Visits (dietetics, nuclear medicine, sonography, MLT, med rad tech) – Vancouver, BC
- SonoCon 2024 – Vancouver, BC
- Emergency Nurses BC Conference – Harrison Hotsprings, BC

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

## Capital Projects

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### **New energy upgrades enhance comfort and efficiency at Gateway Lodge**

In a significant step towards sustainability and improved efficiency, Gateway Lodge in Prince George has recently undergone a series of energy upgrades and improvements. These enhancements include the installation of a new chiller, upgrades to kitchen ventilation systems, optimization of heat recovery, LED lighting upgrades, and improvements to building controls. These improvements are set to reduce the facility's carbon emissions by 50%. [Read the rest of the story on our Stories site.](#)

### **Dawson Creek & District Hospital Replacement Project**

In case you missed it... read the [September edition of the Quarterly Update](#) to learn more about where we're at with the project, what's next, department highlights, and recent engagement initiatives.

### **Department Highlight – Inpatient Unit and Rooms**

The inpatient unit in the new hospital will have 32 medical and surgical beds and 10 convalescent care beds. All inpatient rooms are private with ensuite washrooms, are located around the perimeter of the building, and have large windows for access to natural light. Each room includes a patient bed, bedside table, furniture for visitors, interactive patient education/entertainment station, wardrobe, and a ceiling lift extending from the bed into the washroom. Throughout the inpatient unit, there are also visitor and patient lounges and dining spaces, family consult rooms, and quiet rooms. Visit Let's Talk DCDH to [learn more about the inpatient unit and rooms.](#)

## Northern Health Stories highlights

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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:

- [Talking to teens about energy drinks](#)
- [Jago Award recipient: Innovation - Helen Styles](#)
- [NH Dietitian Erin Branco awarded Marie Taylor Award](#)
- [Children aged 11 and younger can now be signed up for HealthElife: Mom of two shares her experience](#)
- [GoHealth BC campaign wins two awards](#)
- [GoHealth BC nurse provides education opportunities to the Stewart Community](#)
- [Showcasing the hidden gems of the North: #SnapsByStaff](#)
- [“We’re doing it!” One remote Northern family’s experience feeding their tongue-tied baby](#)
- [Prenatal hand expression: A chat with Dr. Jacobus Strydom](#)
- [Northern Health celebrates Allied Health Professionals Day](#)
- [Sharing the hidden gems of the North: #SnapsByStaff](#)
- [Falls Prevention and Healthy Aging Grant](#)
- [Jago Award recipients: Collaboration – Ashley Stoppler and Rosetta Mitchell](#)
- [Indigenous Care Coordinator Stories – Lyndsey Rhea](#)

## Ministry highlights

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

- [Better patient care, more nurses coming to B.C.](#)
- [B.C. connecting thousands of people to family doctors quicker than ever](#)
- [Province launches secure care for people with brain injury, mental illness, severe addiction](#)
- [Indigenous people getting more access to treatment, recovery](#)

## Public Health

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### Updated vaccines for influenza, COVID-19 available throughout BC

Updated vaccines that protect against the latest influenza strains and COVID-19 variants circulating are available for people in B.C. to help protect families, communities and the health-care system.

Dr. Bonnie Henry, provincial health officer for B.C., again encourages people six months and older to get immunized with the updated influenza and COVID-19 vaccines, and to exercise healthy habits to stay well this fall and winter. [Read more information here.](#)

### Northern Health Communities E-Brief – September 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 September 2024.](#)

To subscribe to this monthly newsletter, please email [healthycommunities@northernhealth.ca](mailto:healthycommunities@northernhealth.ca) with the subject line "subscribe."

## Overdose prevention and response

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### More than 1,700 lives lost to drug toxicity in first nine months of 2024

Unregulated toxic drugs claimed the lives of 187 British Columbians in August and 183 in September, according to the BC Coroners Service.

The preliminary data finds that since January 2024, at least 1,749 people have died from unregulated drug toxicity in communities throughout the province.

The data for the first nine months of 2024 represents an 8% decrease from the number of deaths during the first nine months of 2023 (1,896). In both August and September, approximately six people died each day from suspected unregulated drugs.

For more findings from the latest report: [Read more](#).

### Toxic drug alert: Prince George – November 27, 2024

Northern Health has issued a Drug Advisory for **Prince George**. A pressed, white, 8mg tablet sold as Dilaudid/Dilly tested positive for fentanyl. The pill looks very similar to a prescription Dilaudid or Hydromorphone.

[We have included safety recommendations on our website.](#)

### Toxic drug alert: Prince Rupert – October 30, 2024

There has been an increase in overdoses in the community of Prince Rupert linked to drugs sold as "down". Overdoses occurring when drugs are smoked, individuals require multiple doses of naloxone to reverse.

Take care, drugs move throughout the North, please share this alert widely. [We have included safety recommendations on our website.](#)

### 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](#).