
NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
2020HLTH0281-001737
Sept. 15, 2020

Ministry of Health
Island Health

Transforming primary care in Cowichan

DUNCAN – Government is transforming everyday health care for people living in the Cowichan region by establishing a primary care network, which will bring additional resources and strengthened support to the region.

“As part of our government’s primary care strategy, we’re making life healthier and better for everyone in B.C. Through primary care networks, we are providing team-based health care and are giving people a seamless patient-centred experience that is responsive to the unique needs of each community,” said Adrian Dix, Minister of Health. “The primary care network in Cowichan will bring meaningful change in the communities by helping more local residents access the comprehensive care they need and deserve, closer to home.”

The Ministry of Health will provide approximately \$6.5 million in annual funding to the primary care network once it is fully operational.

Over the next four years, residents of Cowichan will benefit from 36.2 full-time equivalent health providers who will provide better access to primary care. This includes family physicians, nurse practitioners and allied health professionals such as registered nurses, social workers and a clinical pharmacist.

In addition, a team of primary care and allied health professionals will be recruited in support of Indigenous health. For Indigenous peoples, this will mean more co-ordinated and culturally safe primary care support.

The Cowichan primary care networks will see community partners working together to ensure thousands of people have access to comprehensive, co-ordinated and team-based primary care services for all of their day-to-day health-care needs in Cowichan communities.

The primary care network will provide a full range of accessible, everyday health services that will better support patients and providers. The network was developed to better meet the specific needs of the community and to strengthen services identified as high priority. These include:

- improved access for those with mild to moderate mental health conditions within the primary care setting;
- better co-ordinated services for families and seniors who are frail and people with complex health issues;
- more access to comprehensive services for people living in poverty; and
- culturally safe care for Indigenous peoples.

For people and families, it means getting faster, better access to their primary care team or

provider, including evenings and weekends, as well as being connected to appropriate services and supports in the community.

Over the next four years, the network will work to attach 16,750 patients to a consistent primary care provider in the region, while providing team-based and culturally-safe care to local residents.

“For far too long, many Indigenous people have felt disconnected from the health-care system,” said Sheila Malcolmson, MLA for Nanaimo. “With an emphasis on providing culturally safe and welcoming spaces, the team-based, networked care launching in the region incorporates the knowledge of First Nations partners about what is needed to better support the community to regular primary care.”

The Cowichan primary care network is a result of a partnership between the Ministry of Health, Island Health, the Cowichan Valley Division of Family Practice, First Nations Health Authority, local Indigenous organizations and communities, and Our Cowichan Communities Health Network.

Learn More:

To learn more about the Province’s primary health-care strategy, visit:

<https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2018PREM0034-001010>

To learn more about the Province’s strategy to increase the number of nurse practitioners,

visit: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2018HLTH0034-000995>

To learn more about the Province’s strategy to recruit and retain more family medicine

graduates, visit: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2018HLTH0052-001043>

Two backgrounders follow.

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BACKGROUND 1

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Facts about the Cowichan primary care network

According to BC Stats data, the communities that the Cowichan primary care network will serve have a combined population of 90,380. Services will be available in Cowichan and North Cowichan.

Primary care networks mean that patients:

- who don't have a regular primary care provider - a family doctor or nurse practitioner - will be able to get one;
- will have an ongoing relationship with their primary care provider, which is important for their life-long health;
- will get access to faster, more convenient care from their doctor or nurse practitioner and the care team;
- will be provided and connected with a range of appropriate and accessible services and supports;
- will be informed about all aspects of their care in community; and
- will know where to go to get the care they need, even on evenings and weekends.

New resources being allocated include:

Cowichan PCN

- 8 FTE family physicians
- 5.0 FTE nurse practitioners
- 9.2 FTE registered nurses
- 1.0 FTE pharmacist
- 13.0 FTE social workers, including 8 FTE to be based out of Central Cowichan and 2 FTE to be based out of Cowichan North
- 1.0 FTE Indigenous primary care network leader

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BACKGROUND 2

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What people are saying about primary care networks

Leah Hollins, board chair, Island Health –

“Island Health is pleased to contribute towards the advancement of a primary care network in the Cowichan region alongside the many dedicated care providers in the community. By working together with our partners, which include many Indigenous communities in the area, we can transform health-care journeys for patients in Cowichan, as well as the remarkable care professionals whose life’s work is dedicated to keeping families healthy and well.”

Dr. Jim Broere, Cowichan PCN physician lead –

"These additional resources increase the sustainability of family practice across Cowichan. We are looking forward to strengthening team-based care and enhancing the connection between primary care and the social determinants of health – a key goal identified by physicians, nurse practitioners, and all our partners."

Brennan MacDonald, executive director for Vancouver Island, First Nations Health Authority –

“The planning, design and provision of culturally safe care in the primary care networks by and with First Nations is key to improving health outcomes and tackling systemic racism. The First Nations Elders, traditional practitioners and healers embedded in this network, will be critical to the success of this approach to inclusive, culturally relevant team-based care.”

Dr. Kathleen Ross, president, Doctors of BC –

“The best health-care systems in the world have strong primary care and we hope that the primary care network initiative provides additional needed resources to doctors serving their community, especially those who strengthen longitudinal care in these pandemic times. A primary care network will collectively increase a community’s capacity to provide greater access to primary care for those who need it, especially for vulnerable patients and those with complex health conditions.”

Michael Sandler, executive director, Nurses and Nurse Practitioners of BC –

“The Association of the Nurses and Nurse Practitioners of BC is pleased that the knowledge, skills and expertise of the entire health-care team will improve access to health care for British Columbians through the new primary care network. We believe that this approach will be pivotal in ensuring B.C. families feel connected to their health-care team and we are excited to see the launch of primary care networks in B.C.”

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