
NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
2020HLTH0289-001749
Sept. 15, 2020

Ministry of Health
Island Health
First Nations Health Authority

Transforming primary care in the Comox Valley

COURTENAY – The Government of British Columbia is supporting the transformation of health care for people living in the Comox Valley through the establishment of a primary care network, which will bring additional resources and strengthened supports to the region.

“Team-based care that responds to the needs of each community, as identified by those working in them, is going to be the backbone of the new primary care system in B.C. and will be how patients' everyday health-care needs are met today, tomorrow and beyond,” said Adrian Dix, Minister of Health. “These networks will work together to address long-standing gaps in everyday health care for people living in the Comox Valley.”

Over the next three years, up to 13 new full-time equivalent health-care providers will be recruited. These will include a nurse practitioner, registered nurses, allied health-care professionals and a clinical pharmacist.

The Province will provide approximately \$2.2 million in annual funding to the primary care network once it is fully established.

The network in Comox Valley will see community partners work together to improve health-care access and enhanced delivery of healthcare for people in the Comox Valley.

“With focused attention on making sure Comox Valley’s seniors, First Nations people and residents with mental health and substance use issues have access to co-ordinated, quality primary and community care, the Comox Valley primary care network will benefit some of the region’s most vulnerable people,” said Ronna-Rae Leonard, MLA for Courtenay-Comox. “I’m proud of our government for giving this work the priority it deserves.”

Currently, the Comox Valley has eight family practice clinics with over 50 physicians participating in the implementation of team-based care within the primary care network, and 133 active physicians as part of the local Division of Family Practice. The network will partner new and existing health-care professionals with these clinics, Vancouver Island Health Authority, new Indigenous health resources, First Nations Health Authority resources and community organizations as part of a networked, team-based approach to providing integrated, whole-person care.

The network will provide a full range of accessible, everyday health services, which will better support patients and providers. It will also focus on improving access to strengthened, services to the following populations:

- people with mental health and substance use issues;

- Indigenous peoples; and
- frail seniors and people with complex health issues.

For people and families, it means getting faster, better access to their primary care team or provider, even on evenings and weekends, as well as being connected to appropriate services and supports in the community.

As part of this work, a new Indigenous wellness liaison position and an Indigenous wellness advocate position have been created to engage Indigenous peoples in the Comox Valley with primary care. Both positions will assist in creating stronger linkages and continuity between various health-care services and will help foster welcoming primary care spaces. For Indigenous peoples, this will mean more co-ordinated and culturally safe primary care support.

In late 2019, primary care network funding was directed toward the Health Connections Clinic, which provides team-based care for people with complex medical and/or socio-economic needs in the Comox Valley. The team was expanded to add one nurse practitioner, two registered nurses and a social worker. Further, primary care network funding has also added a significant increase in physician clinic time for those who access the Health Connections Clinic.

Over the next two years, remaining staff will be recruited into the network with a focus on providing services to the community based on need and discussions with partners.

“The creation of teams and increased attachment rates have been developed with the health-care professionals and service agencies at a community level. As a result, this is a plan that is reflective and responsive to the care needs of the people they serve, and it will build and refine over time as recruitment and services ramp up,” Dix said.

The Comox Valley primary care network is a partnership between the Ministry of Health, Island Health, the Comox Valley Division of Family Practice, the First Nations Health Authority, K’òmoks First Nation, Patient Voices Network and Métis Nation British Columbia.

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.

Contact:

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BACKGROUND 1

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Primary care networks in B.C.

The Comox Valley region includes the City of Courtenay, the Town of Comox, the Village of Cumberland and surrounding areas, including Denman and Hornby Islands. These communities have a combined population of 70,046, which is expected to grow to 75,465 by the year 2028.

Primary care networks mean that patients:

- who do not 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:

- 285 family physician sessions
- 1 FTE nurse practitioner
- 2.99 FTE registered nurses
- 8 FTE allied health professionals
- 1 FTE clinical pharmacist
- 1 FTE Indigenous wellness liaison
- 1 FTE Indigenous wellness advocate

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BACKGROUND 2

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What people are saying about primary care networks

Leah Hollins, board chair, Island Health —

“With an emphasis on providing culturally safe and welcoming spaces, the team-based care launching in the region incorporates the feedback from First Nations partners about what is needed to better support the community with access to primary care.”

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 that 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 networks. 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.”

Dr. Bonnie Bagdan, primary care network lead, Comox Valley Division of Family Practice —

“We, the Comox Valley Division of Family Practice and our members, are excited to be working together with the Ministry of Health, Island Health, First Nations Health Authority, Indigenous health partners, Métis Nation British Columbia and patient partners to address and lead health care transformation in B.C. with a common goal of improving and sustaining health care access, capacity and delivery for our community.”

Barb Whyte, Elder, K’òmoks First Nation —

“I was invited to participate in planning for the Comox Valley Primary Care Network in June 2018, acting as an Indigenous advocate to assist in the creation of a healthy partnership for stronger connections between health deliveries to indigenous peoples and K’òmoks First Nation that anchors respect, in a culturally safe atmosphere that fosters integrity and humility. I have been working alongside the local division of family practice and health leads on an equal footing to help ensure our voices come together to embrace our rich diversities and perspectives to support health care access, capacity and delivery to our Indigenous peoples and K’òmoks First Nation.”

Destinée Barrow, regional health co-ordinator – Vancouver Island, Métis Nation British Columbia —

“We are looking forward to this new and innovative partnership. The primary care network will improve access to services and provide opportunities for the unique needs of Métis people to be addressed in a culturally safe and meaningful way”.

Edna Leask, patient partner, Patient Voices Network —

“As a patient partner, my expectation is that the Comox primary care network will empower patients to have a voice in the care and management of their health and wellness. The network will provide services that are easy to navigate and accessible where the patient’s needs are central and met respectfully by a team of health care professionals who get to know the patient’s story and work with them and their families to improve their experiences and quality of care, resulting in best outcomes.”

Jim Lyster, patient partner, Patient Voices Network —

“I anticipate an approach to medical services that looks at the whole person and streamlines the systems to make a wide variety of professionals centrally available.”

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