

For Immediate Release | Dec. 21, 2022

Interior Health Board Chair Dr. Doug Cochrane reflects on 2022

As I mark my fifth year as Board Chair of Interior Health (IH), I reflect on the highlights and challenges of 2022. Undoubtedly, times have been difficult for many people in the Interior, and especially tough on health-care workers. Our staff experienced the pressures to organize and deliver care in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, respond to the toxic drug crisis, and handle an unusually early and more powerful respiratory virus season.

Health care is made up of people – your family, your friends, your neighbours – doing their best in their jobs to care for people in very trying times. I am extremely proud of our staff, medical practitioners, physicians and volunteers who, through their dedication to providing quality patient care, live our vision of health and well-being for all, every day.

It wasn't long ago we were banging on pots in our driveways to celebrate health-care workers. For many, those days are a distant memory as our staff face emotional exhaustion, moral distress and the added impact of mistreatment from the public at times. On behalf of the Board of Directors at IH, I want our staff to know that we and your Senior Executive Team see and appreciate what you are going through. We are committed to working for you to make your workplaces better. I also want to thank our patients and clients for your kindness, patience and insightful feedback as we continue to work together.

In addition to our people, our partnerships have made great things happen this year.

We continue to work hand-in-hand with Aboriginal partners to achieve equitable treatment and improved health outcomes for everyone in the Interior. As part of our commitment to implement anti-racism and culturally safe care, we have strengthened our partnerships with Aboriginal communities.

2022 marked the 12-year anniversary of Interior Health's Aboriginal Patient Navigator (APN) program; there are now 13 APNs at IH sites who support patients and families. Eight new Nation-IH Partnership positions were also created. All these positions help connect Aboriginal patients to appropriate health-care services, provide emotional and cultural support, and ensure advocacy for Aboriginal patients receiving care in IH's facilities and services. Nation engagement on priority areas, including mental health and substance use (MHSU) and creating seamless transitions from hospital to community, go hand-in-hand with our partnerships as we together implement key recommendations within the *In Plain Sight* report.

In July, with funding from our partners Thompson Regional Hospital District and Royal Inland Hospital (RIH) Foundation, we welcomed the first patients to the new Phil & Jennie Gagliardi Tower at RIH in Kamloops. In collaboration with stakeholders, we opened an urgent and primary care centre to support our residents in Ashcroft, and completed construction on the pharmacy, oncology department and cast clinic at Kootenay Boundary Regional Hospital in Trail. We are working with partners to re-establish health services in Lytton and surrounding areas. We also announced long-term care projects underway across the region, and new MHSU services in a number of communities.

Interior Health would like to recognize and acknowledge the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territories of the Dākelh Dené, Ktunaxa, Nlaka'pamux, Secwépemc, St'át'imc, Syilx, and Tsilhqot'in Nations, where we live, learn, collaborate and work together.

We continue to develop new ways to use technology to support patients as they navigate health services. IH's Digital Health Support Desk allows patients, caregivers and their families to more easily access IH virtual and digital tools, including lab appointment bookings.

There is much to celebrate, but we also have much to accomplish; at the forefront are the staffing challenges across health care. Our leadership has worked tirelessly to fill unplanned vacant shifts to maintain services throughout our region. We launched a new, improved careers website that makes it faster and easier for job seekers to apply for careers with IH. We also continue to encourage people seeking health-care careers, such as through the Health Career Access Program and the new Associate Physician program.

While there is much work ahead, it has never been more important we acknowledge our staff and their work. Your dedication, expertise and commitment to the care of others are the foundation upon which IH can offer health and well-being for all.

Thank you, lim lemp̓t.

Best wishes to you and yours this holiday season.

- 30 -