



# COMMUNITY UPDATE

*The latest from Northern Health*

**January 2025**

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 Fort St. James hospital open for patients**

People in Fort St. James and area have enhanced access to health care in state-of-the-art surroundings with the opening of the new hospital on Tuesday, January 14, 2025.

"We're thrilled to announce that the new hospital is opening to patients in Fort St. James, increasing access to health care close to home," said Josie Osborne, Minister of Health. "This facility represents a significant investment in the health and well-being of people in the region; a need that First Nations and local communities have been expressing for decades. We

recognized the urgency of replacing the facility and now both the community and workers will benefit from a modern health-care environment in this state-of-the-art facility.”

The new facility is three times the size of the previous hospital and has 27 beds, with 18 long-term care and nine acute-care beds. It has an expanded emergency department with two treatment rooms, a trauma bay and an ambulance bay. In addition, there are bigger laboratory and diagnostic-imaging spaces. [Read the rest of the announcement on the Government of BC website.](#)

### **The Northern Health region celebrates 2025 New Year’s babies**

Every New Year’s Day, Northern Health monitors its hospitals and labour and delivery units for the birth of New Year’s babies across the region.

[Visit this page](#) for details on the births of 2025 New Year’s babies in communities across the North.

### **Northern Health reboots CLICK for Babies™ with launch of Period of PURPLE Crying program**

New parents and caregivers of newborns and 2-month-old infants in the Northern Health region are receiving a handmade purple knitted or crocheted cap, along with education and resources, as Northern Health reboots CLICK for Babies™ with the Period of PURPLE Crying program.

The goal of the purple cap campaign, called CLICK for Babies™, is to raise awareness about PURPLE crying and the importance of never shaking infants and young children. “PURPLE crying” is a normal phase of infant development when a baby cries inconsolably for long periods of time, starting around two weeks of age, peaking around two months, then decreasing - and it can be frustrating and overwhelming for parents and caregivers. The program provides evidence-based information about the normalcy of inconsolable crying, how to cope with negative feelings, and tips to soothe babies.

NH received more than 1,250 caps from PSBSBC to restart the CLICK campaign in NH for 2025. Stay tuned later this year, when NH will have more information on plans to expand the campaign to invite Northern BC knitters, crocheters and crafters to make both baby caps and booties! [Read the full media release on the Northern Health 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

People can 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, and [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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### GoHealth BC nurses provided over 320K hours of service in 2024

Last year, [GoHealth BC](#) nurses worked a total of 321,845 hours in 34 rural and remote communities in BC! Thank you to these nurses who travel from all over the country to provide support in hard-to-reach communities across our region and the province. Burns Lake is the newest NH community to join GoHealth BC.

### 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 January, the recruiters have attended or presented at:

- Canadian Association of Pharmacy Students and Interns Conference - Halifax, NS
- Presentation to Family Medicine Residents with Dr. Jawanda - Prince George
- Rural FP Anesthesia - Banff, AB
- Rural ER 2025 Conference - Banff, AB

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

## Capital Projects

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### **Honouring culture: Dakelh language signs in the new Fort St. James hospital**

We're excited to share that the new Fort St. James hospital will have signs in Dakelh, the language of the Nak'azdli Whut'en territory.

These signs were made with the guidance of Elders and language experts from the Nak'azdli, Binche, Tl'azt'en, Yekooche, and Takla First Nations.

The opening of this hospital is more than just a new building; it's a chance to reflect on our past and plan for a better future. By using the Dakelh language, we aim to provide culturally safe care to everyone who uses the new hospital. [To see the new signage, read the full story on our Let's Talk page.](#)

### **Supporting families: The new palliative care lounge in the new Fort St. James hospital**

One of the features of the new Fort St. James Hospital and Health Centre is the family lounge connected to the palliative care room. This lounge lets family and friends stay close to their loved ones in a cozy and supportive space. It also has direct access to the outdoor healing garden, a perfect spot for relaxation.

We believe that a warm and welcoming atmosphere is crucial for the well-being of our patients and their families. The healing garden and family lounge are just a couple of ways we are making our facility a place of comfort. [Read more on our Let's Talk website.](#)

### **Dawson Creek & District Hospital replacement project**

In early December, the Dawson Creek skyline returned to its original state as we said [farewell to the two tower cranes \(aka Hank and Dan\)](#). The tower cranes played a crucial role in the construction of the new hospital, and they captured the hearts and imaginations of our community. Their departure marks the end of an era but also reminds us of the power of progress as we look forward to the opening of the new Dawson Creek & District Hospital in Spring 2027.

Prior to the holidays, Graham Design-Builders and Northern Health representatives and users met on-site to review a [mock-up of the inpatient washroom and accessories](#). Collecting user input and feedback is an important step of the ongoing design process in order to ensure the design meets the highest standards of functionality and safety. The feedback gathered was centered around the placement of the nurse call and emergency buttons, paper towel dispensers, nightlight, grab bars, backrest, sink cleanout, and cut off valves.

Recently, the Northern Lights College (NLC) Executive and Health Sciences teams had a tour of the new hospital and were very excited to see the remarkable progress being made. We would like to recognize that NLC has been an excellent neighbour since construction started. They allowed Graham Design-Builders to lease portions of their land for site offices and parking lots and worked closely with us on road closure planning and notices. In return, we have provided them with excavated dirt and fill for future projects on their campus. In addition, the rear access road into the NLC campus will be straightened out, which will improve accessibility for everyone using the road.

## 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:

- [Indigenous Care Stories - Gloria Lattie](#)
- [Aarya's journey: From volunteer to mentor at UHNBC](#)
- [Indigenous Care Stories - Kelly Stalker](#)
- [Substance Use Prevention in the Robson Valley](#)
- [Holiday donations: Support your local food bank](#)
- [Indigenous Care Stories - Patricia Hoard](#)
- [Lighting the path to sustainability at Dunrovin Park Lodge](#)
- [Indigenous Care Stories - Rachel Weller](#)
- [Indigenous Care Stories - Valerie Setah](#)
- [Small steps to start a nursing career in Northern BC](#)
- [Ditch the diet: Rekindle a positive relationship with food](#)
- [Community comes together to tackle water woes at Stuart Lake Hospital](#)
- [Creating a culturally safe space: The new Fort St. James Hospital and Health Centre](#)

## Ministry highlights

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

- [More substance-use treatment coming to B.C.](#)
- [Travel supports increase access to health care](#)
- [Minister's statement on lives lost to poisoned drugs in October](#)

## 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 – January 2025**

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 January 2025.](#)

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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### **Toxic drug alert: Dawson Creek**

Northern Health has issued a Toxic Drug Alert for Dawson Creek. A bright pink pill being sold as fentanyl has been linked to sudden overdoses requiring naloxone and/or hospitalization. Overdoses occur when the substance is consumed orally, inhaled, or injected. Use caution when using substance through any route.

For more information and local supports, [please visit 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.](#)

[Further information and local supports are available on our website.](#)