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First Nations Virtual Doctor of the Day Service Provides Culturally-Safe Primary Care for First Nations People in BC

May 25, 2019

First Nations Health Authority

Coast Salish Territory – The First Nations Health Authority's (FNHA) accelerated launch of the First Nations Virtual Doctor of the Day program ensures primary health care remains accessible during the COVID-19 pandemic to all First Nations people living in British Columbia.

The program—created in partnership with the Rural Coordination Centre of BC (RCCbc)—provides virtual appointments with doctors who are trained in the principles of cultural safety and humility, and are familiar with the unique aspects of rural and remote community health care.

FNHA's ongoing priority is to remove physical and historical barriers to culturally-safe, appropriate primary care. Now, a simple phone call and one-click process connects clients with the First Nations Virtual Doctor of the Day through video conference or telephone appointment. First Nations clients have timely access to a quality service even during a pandemic.

First Nations clients in BC who do not have a doctor of their own, or have lost access due to COVID-19, can call **1-855-344-3800** to book an appointment or email virtualdoctor@rccbc.ca. Appointments are facilitated by a team of trained Medical Office Assistants who will work with the client's schedule.

Quotes:

“The Virtual Doctor of the Day program from the FNHA is an innovative use of telehealth technology that provides a vital primary care option for First Nations people in BC during the COVID-19 pandemic,” said Charlene Belleau, Chairperson of the First Nations Health Council. “This program is an example of why the FNHA was created from the vision of BC

First Nations leaders – to self-determine the kind of culturally safe health services that meet the needs of Indigenous patients, particularly Elders and Knowledge Keepers.”

“In these challenging times, it is more important than ever that all Canadians, including First Nations, Inuit and Métis, have access to the tools and resources they need to support their health and well-being,” said Marc Miller, Minister of Indigenous Services. “First Nations Virtual Doctor of the Day meets today’s need and sets the stage for the future. I want to congratulate the First Nations Health Authority for its prompt and innovative response to the COVID-19 crisis, addressing a challenge that many remote communities face.”

“The pandemic led to the closure of many community-based health centres and doctors’ offices across the province,” says Richard Jock, FNHA Interim CEO. “We fast-tracked a service that provides respectful, regionally-based virtual care for First Nations people so they can receive the care they need closer to home.”

“We are excited/proud that this program was developed by First Nations for First Nations and one-third of the doctors providing service are Indigenous themselves,” says FNHA board chair Colleen Erickson. “Working with our partners has resulted in an innovative way to bring culturally safe medical services right into the home of rural and remote First Nations citizens.

“We hear from Health Directors working in communities across BC that distance is a recurring challenge to providing equal access to healthcare,” said Keith Marshall, President of the First Nations Health Directors Association. “The Virtual Doctor of the Day program goes a long way in providing primary care to rural and remote communities – and will be a critical tool for beyond our collective response to the pandemic.”

“The First Nations Virtual Doctor of the Day will improve health equity and act as a safety net for those who face obstacles in accessing health care, particularly in rural, remote and First Nations communities. We are proud to be a member of the partnership that developed this,” said Dr. Ray Markham, Executive Director of the Rural Coordination Centre of BC.

Backgrounder:

- The service is free to all First Nations people living in BC and their families, even if those family members are non-status.
- The service is currently staffed by 31 doctors.
- One-third of the doctors are of Indigenous ancestry.
- Doctors are deployed in all 5 regions based on their specifications and familiarity with the region.

- The program uses Zoom for Healthcare, which has added privacy for medical appointments—video and audio appointments are not recorded or saved.
- Zoom for Healthcare is approved for use by the BC Ministry of Health and the Provincial Health Services Authority.
- Learn how the program works at www.fnha.ca/virtualdoctor where you will find additional resources such as:
 - Video and podcast interview with Dr. Kelsey Louie, one of the Indigenous doctors working in the new First Nations Virtual Doctor of the Day service.
 - Video on how to book a Virtual Doctor's appointment.
 - Information and FAQs for health professionals.

Learn more:

The First Nations Health Authority (FNHA) is the first province-wide health authority of its kind in Canada. It is the health and wellness partner to over 200 diverse First Nations communities and citizens across BC.

To find out more visit: <http://www.fnha.ca/>

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