

Helping Rural, Remote and Indigenous Communities Respond to COVID-19

April 22, 2020 | On April 20th, 2020, the provincial government announced a new collaborative framework to help ensure people living in rural, remote and all Indigenous communities in British Columbia (BC) have appropriate health supports during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. This framework includes immediate actions to improve health-care services and respond to the pandemic, including:

- Enhanced medical transportation options to larger centres, including flights and ambulances;
- Short-term accommodations options for people needing to self-isolate near their families while remaining in their home communities or options to develop accommodation near larger centres with more medical services;
- New and faster COVID-19 testing technology, which uses a team-based approach;
- First Nations Virtual Doctor of the Day, a program that connects First Nations members and their families in remote communities to a doctor using videoconferencing; and
- Increased mental health supports in communities.

We collectively recognize the needs of each community and region will be unique, and plans must be responsive to individual community needs, guided by culturally safe and appropriate care. These new resources and services will build on and complement ongoing work to support First Nations with their pandemic responses, led by the First Nations Health Authority (FNHA) with support from Indigenous Services Canada and Emergency Management BC.

The FNHA, First Nations Health Council (FNHC), First Nation Health Directors Association (FNHDA), regional health authorities and BC Emergency Health Services will work with First Nations in the coming days to identify needs and develop plans together at both the regional and community level.

The next steps include:

- Each region working with the Partnership Accord Table, and regional health authorities to develop a detailed response plan incorporating the elements of the Framework.
- A direct circle of care of regulated health professionals who will provide direct support and service to individuals through the COVID-19 testing, isolation, transportation and acute care process.
- A supportive circle for a First Nation community, e.g. regional executive directors, health directors, community nursing staff and transportation supports.
- Expansion of the First Nation Virtual Doctor of the Day program launched by FNHA to include access to mental health supports.

The framework is flexible so that all BC First Nations communities can adapt it to meet their unique needs and preparations. Throughout the pandemic the framework will be implemented through engagement with community leaders. When the pandemic is over, it is understood that the need for improvements in providing health services and access to services broadly in communities will continue. A legacy of this framework will be ongoing, improved medical transportation.

For more information, please see the news release issued by the Province yesterday at:

<https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2020PREM0020-000725>

Please do not hesitate to contact info@fnha.ca if you have any questions.



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