

The SaferCare Initiative Update

August 25, 2025



Pictured: Nats'oojeh Hospital and Health Centre, and Ksyen Regional Hospital

Approved! Ministry gives green light for SaferCare to continue

The Ministry of Health has approved funding to continue to advance SaferCare and implementations at our two newest hospitals:

- Fort St. James – Nats'oojeh Hospital and Health Centre (NHHHC)
- Terrace – Ksyen Regional Hospital (KRH)

These implementations will occur in 2026, with specific timing to be announced this fall.

This marks a significant milestone in our digital transformation journey and reflects the Ministry's prioritization of modern, state-of-the-art facilities that are equipped to support digitally enabled clinical ways of working and operations. As a result, our initial planned first SaferCare implementations on Haida Gwaii are paused. However, we remain committed to applying the insights and learnings from our early planning. The narrowing of scope and focus to the hospitals in Fort St James and Terrace is a result of several factors, including:

- System-wide financial pressures requiring prioritization of limited resources
- Strategic alignment with provincial clinical information system convergence
- NH's newest hospitals are designed for digitally enabled clinical and operational environment and lack of long-term capacity for paper-based processes

Approval and funding have not been granted for SaferCare implementations at Dawson Creek's new facility or at other NH sites at this time. The Ministry's direction for advancing beyond the two approved sites is connected to the funding and timeline under consideration to transition to a provincial clinical information system.



If you have questions, reach out to the SaferCare team at safercare@northernhealth.ca

NH listens, SaferCare questions addressed

The Ministry approvals line up nicely after questions were raised about SaferCare at the recent [NH Listens Town Halls](#) on July 9 ([53:32](#)) and July 10 ([36:20](#)). Ciro Panessa, President & CEO, and Jeff Hunter VP Digital Health, addressed key questions about SaferCare. Highlights included:

- Advocacy for a northern or province-wide clinical information system
- Emphasis on the need for an integrated system to improve coordination of care, reduce administrative burdens
- The importance of equity in technological enablement across the province.

We recommend checking out all the town hall materials and recordings.

What has the SaferCare team been working on, and what's next?

It's been a challenging time for the project team (and sites) as we worked through the uncertainty. We really appreciate the continued patience, resilience and support as we move forward through the design and build work. Here are some key activities the project team has completed since the last SaferCare update:

Design & Build

- Digital order sets (PowerPlans): Wave 1 order sets (required for NHHc) 84% clinically reviewed, and 79% medically signed off. Wave 2 order sets (required for KRH) are at risk of being completed in advance of training as clinical review and medical sign-off has been limited/slow.

Testing

- Integration Testing 2 (IT2) completed: most of the test scripts were completed successfully without any outstanding issues. This marked a major milestone in validating the system design and workflows across all solutions.
- The team is actively building key functionality into our already in use Cerner system to support our cutover and go live for SaferCare

Implementation and change management preparations

- Training: the Cerner training environment was configured and set-up for the project team to begin training preparations. Technically managing all the Cerner environments to ensure alignment - there are separate ones for building/testing, training and operational use - is a significant challenge.
- Business Process Mapping reprioritized: current and future state workflows reviewed, with pivot to new lighter Start/Stop/Continue approach



- Change Management Planning: Validated change journey activities with site leadership, developed sponsor activities, and continued work on a SaferCare implementation Toolkit

SurgCare

- Back in November, we announced the end of separate sub-projects – SurgCare, EmergCare and InCare – and these were collapsed into the single integrated SaferCare project structure. We attempted to continue a portion of SurgCare as “Phase 1a” at Ksyen and Prince Rupert surgical sites. However, due to funding uncertainty and struggles with site and project team capacity, we had to make the decision to end this Phase too. Ksyen will now go-live with the full scope SurgCare as part of the broader SaferCare implementation, and Prince Rupert’s implementation is yet to be determined.

Next steps

We will be posting and hiring additional SaferCare project and site positions to ramp up and prepare for implementations in Fort St James, and then Terrace. These roles are essential to ensuring readiness, successful implementation, system optimization, and long-term sustainment. The funding for these positions is a targeted allocation from the Ministry, specifically designated to advance SaferCare at these sites.

So long, farewell, auf wiedersehen, goodbye.

With mixed emotions we also learned this month that Dr. Kristina Garrels, our SaferCare Medical Lead, will be departing Northern Health to take on a full-time surgical role at Peterborough Regional Hospital in Ontario. Over the past two years, Kristina has been a driving force behind SaferCare — bringing thoughtful leadership, deep clinical insight, an experience informatics perspective, and unwavering commitment to quality and safety. Her contributions have shaped key elements of our system design and build, enhanced our order set management approach, and strengthened engagement with NH medical staff and leaders across the region. We are deeply grateful for Kristina’s impact and wish her every success in this next chapter.

SaferCare medical leadership will transition to Dr. Tim Graham, NH’s Chief Medical Information Officer, who was appointed earlier this year. We look forward to continuing this important work under Tim’s guidance



Staff spotlight: Bjorn Butow, SaferCare IMIT Lead



Bjorn Butow has been with NH since 2008 and is responsible for NH's clinical information systems and digital transformation initiatives. This includes modernizing, digitally enabling, and improving how NH rural health professionals work, health services are delivered, and health spaces function. He's also involved in the community: coaching youth volleyball and as a board member for The Exploration Place Science Centre & Museum, and the Canadian Mental Health Association of Northern BC.

So why is Bjorn involved in SaferCare?

Because it's not just professional, it's personal—and it's essential. Bjorn's commitment to SaferCare is grounded in his deep roots in northern BC: growing up in the region, participating in the health system, and experiencing family members serve as front-line clinicians. SaferCare is a way to help NH build a safer, more effective, and sustainable health system across the North.

But this work is also timely and urgent. As the economy evolves, healthcare—especially in rural and remote communities—is facing rising demand, an ageing population, and a shrinking pool of health professionals. The result is a system under pressure, where sustainability is increasingly at risk. Bjorn sees SaferCare as a key enabler and foundational response to this challenge. It's about modernizing healthcare through digital tools and more consistent, smarter ways of working—tools that prevent harm, support better clinical decisions, and engage patients and families. It is also essential to enabling hybrid care (in-person + virtual), and flexibility to deploy healthcare professionals across sites using consistent NH-wide processes and digital tools. Bjorn believes that digital innovation, including the responsible use of artificial intelligence, can empower patients to take a more active role in their health journey, while helping clinicians and health services become more productive and effective.

Ultimately, SaferCare is about aligning people, processes, and technology to drive meaningful improvements in front-line care, clinical operations, and patient activation. But it's also a major undertaking—one that requires deep ongoing collaboration across local sites, regional services, front-line staff, management, and provincial partners. Bjorn's leadership in this space reflects both a personal mission and strategic imperative: to ensure we continue to have equitable access to modern healthcare services across northern BC.