

May 3, 2021

Re: Announcement of the Northern Health Virtual Primary and Community Care Clinic

To: Divisions of Family Practice in the North – Executive Directors and Physician Leads

I am writing to provide an update on the long-term evolution of the COVID-19 Online Clinic into the Northern Health Virtual Primary and Community Care Clinic. As you know, the COVID-19 Online Clinic set up at the beginning of the pandemic was an important part of delivering needed services such as COVID-19 screening, assessment, testing and addressing other primary health care needs.

Last fall, we evolved the Clinic to offer additional primary and community care services with a focus on supporting Chetwynd and Fraser Lake. There was a significant demand for the service in these communities and demand has grown more generally, from across the region.

We are now expanding the service, as part of our mandate at Northern Health to increasingly move to a patient-centred model of care, and are launching the Virtual Clinic today, May 3, 2021, making this a permanent virtual service available to support health needs beyond those related to COVID-19. It is designed to serve patients who: are currently unattached to a physician; whose access to primary care is limited due to geography, business hours, or seasonal weather; or who need service after hours. The phone number will remain the same: 1-844-645-7811 and services will be available from 10 am to 10 pm, 7 days a week, including holidays.

Community-based physicians and their offices remain the cornerstone of our health care system and nothing about the new Virtual Clinic changes this. The Virtual Clinic is part of the idealized Northern Health System of Services, which has the delivery of in-person primary care by our family doctors, including the members of the Divisions of Family Practice, at its centre.

The Virtual Clinic is part of an overarching program of increasing access—it is consistent with our goals to build a plan towards facilitating attachment and longitudinal care relationships for patients in their home community with primary care homes. To support this, information-sharing will occur with the patient's primary care provider and other members of the patient's primary care interprofessional team, with the patient's permission. This includes working with the person's primary care provider to arrange for in-person follow-up as required.

We continue to be inspired by the tremendous commitment shown by family physicians during this pandemic and we thank you on behalf of our communities for your dedication and service. We look forward to working collaboratively with you as this new service moves into full implementation over May and beyond. Please feel free to contact us anytime if you have any questions.

Thank you,

Kelly Gunn, Vice President, Primary and Community Care and Professional Practice and Jeff Hunter, Chief Information Officer