

January 20, 2022

Paul Adams
BC Rural Health Network
PO Box 257
Princeton, BC V0X 1W0

Sent via email: paul.bcrhn@gmail.com

Dear Mr. Adams,

Thank you for your letter dated January 20, 2022 and for your advocacy on behalf of the BC Rural Health Network.

As you are aware, COVID-19 and the Omicron wave have significantly increased staffing pressures across Interior Health. To protect the safety of patients and clients and to keep essential health services open, swift action was necessary. All of the changes made this week are designed to prioritize access to emergency and urgent care, and we are committed to returning to regular operations as quickly as possible.

I can assure you that service reductions are in place region-wide: all non-urgent surgeries are being postponed, along with reductions in outpatient clinics and adult day programs. That said, I'm pleased to say that since Tuesday, we have already been able to clarify and reduce some of the impacts announced for our rural sites. Working with our teams and in communication with local leaders, we have not proceeded with the plans to close inpatient services in Invermere. We have also clarified that primary care physician services and access to laboratory services is continuing at the Barriere Health Centre, along with the COVID-19 testing and immunization clinics.

In each of the rural communities where there are site-specific impacts, we have connected with the local elected leaders and will be reassessing the situation together regularly. I know this is a critical component to maintaining confidence in our health system.

Due to the high rates of COVID-19 transmission happening right now, Interior Health is currently receiving hundreds of short notice sick calls every day. Taking yesterday as an example, 30 per cent of almost 800 sick calls were related to COVID-19. This is a significant increase on the volume of absences we normally see and is one of the key metrics and factors in these decisions.

You asked whether staff are being redeployed from rural communities to urban areas; in many cases, these temporary changes are focused on stabilizing services within the local area. For example, reducing overnight emergency department hours at the Slokan Community Health Centre in New Denver will stabilize daytime access at the site. Similarly,

.../2

We recognize and acknowledge that we are collectively gathered on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territories of the seven Interior Region First Nations, where we live, learn, collaborate, and work together. This region is also home to 15 Chartered Métis Communities. It is with humility that we continue to strengthen our relationships with First Nation, Métis, and Inuit peoples across the Interior.

temporarily closing inpatient units at the hospitals in Clearwater and Lillooet helps stabilize emergency department staffing in those same facilities.

I appreciate you raising the challenges of communicating across the more rural areas of our region and your offer of support. We are keeping our public website updated and welcome you to share that information as you have suggested you can do. We are also working hard to share updates through local community leaders and local media, including the media in each of the communities you mention in your letter.

Thank you again for your advocacy and representing the rural and remote community leaders across Interior Health. We appreciate your support as we continue to work together through this difficult phase of the pandemic.

Sincerely,



Susan Brown
President and Chief Executive Officer

cc: Ed Staples
Colin Moss
Peggy Skelton
Leonard Casley
Ted Patterson
Mayor Ferguson
Mayor Casley
Mayor Zeleznik
Mayor Busse
Mayor Stamer
Mayor Blackwell
Mayor Miller

We recognize and acknowledge that we are collectively gathered on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territories of the seven Interior Region First Nations, where we live, learn, collaborate, and work together. This region is also home to 15 Chartered Métis Communities. It is with humility that we continue to strengthen our relationships with First Nation, Métis, and Inuit peoples across the Interior.