



Welcome

Welcome to the latest community update on Victoria County Memorial Hospital (VCMH). This update is provided by Nova Scotia Health and reflects work that is underway at the site and information that has been shared with the VCMH Working Group. It is also a follow-up to information that was shared with the community in April 2023.

In this update, you will find information on the ways Nova Scotia Health and Emergency Health Services (EHS) are partnering to increase access to care in Baddeck, as well as an update on the urgent treatment centre (UTC) and its year-end stats.

Also included are staffing, site, and physician updates for VCMH, the most recent results of the UTC patient feedback surveys, and care options

that have been added outside of Victoria County since the UTC opened.

The VCMH Working Group was formed in October 2022 to work on the transition of the UTC back to an emergency department as well as to discuss opportunities around recruitment, retention, healthcare access and health services planning for VCMH.

A list of the group's member partners is below. As always, the group is open to adding new members. It is currently looking for two or three more community members who are interested in joining the group. If you or someone you know is interested in learning more about this opportunity, email andrew.heighton@nshealth.ca.

About the Working Group:

- Chaired by Andrew Heighton, Director, Integrated Health - Rural Sites, Nova Scotia Health
- Meets monthly in-person/virtually
- Members include representatives from:
 - Local physician group
 - Nova Scotia Health/VCMH staff
 - Provincial government
 - Municipal government
 - Victoria County Community Health Board
 - VCMH Hospital Foundation
 - Alderwood Rest Home
 - Wagmatcook First Nation
 - Waycobah First Nation
 - Physician Recruitment - both Nova Scotia Health & community
 - Emergency Health Services (EHS)
 - Community members
- Openings for two/three community members; email andrew.heighton@nshealth.ca if interested.

Nova Scotia Health, EHS partner on after hours UTC access

In December, Nova Scotia Health and Emergency Health Services (EHS) started to provide after hours care access to people in the Baddeck area.



When a patient from the Baddeck catchment area calls 911 between 4 p.m. and 8 a.m., EHS assesses them, either over the phone or in person and care can be provided in one of the following ways:

- EHS responds, treats and releases the patient.
- EHS contacts VCMH to book a next-day appointment for the patient at the urgent treatment centre (UTC).
- EHS transports the patient to the UTC where they are assessed by a nurse and treated by an EHS virtual physician.
- After EHS phone assessment, patients may be instructed to go to VCMH. EHS will then phone VCMH to provide nursing with this information and heads up that a patient is coming to the site and will be treated by an EHS virtual physician.
- EHS transports the patient to nearest appropriate emergency department.

The care option provided depends on the patient's acuity and whether they meet UTC criteria or need more advanced care.

This new model is the first UTC/EHS collaborative model of care in Nova Scotia. It covers the Baddeck catchment area only which includes:

- Starting after Glendale Road & Highway 105 (Waycobah), headed to VCMH
- Spanning to Lake Ainslie Chapel Road at Highway 252, coming from Inverness proper
- West Lake Ainslie and Lake Ainslie Chapel Road to Baddeck
- Cabot Trail (North Shore) down
- Up to Highway 105 New Harris Forks

“It's still early days and we are still working things out, but we do see benefits to this type of model,” says Andrew Heighton, chair of the VCMH working group. “It improves after-hours access for people in the Baddeck catchment area, and it keeps the ambulance in the community.”

Heighton says they will continue to evaluate the new model as well as explore any additional supports local physicians may be able to provide.

Urgent treatment centre (UTC) update and year-end stats

In 2023, the urgent treatment centre (UTC) at VCMH continued to increase its access to care.

The UTC is now open on Thursdays from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., expanding coverage to seven days a week. Hours are subject to change and any modifications are updated online at www.nshealth.ca/urgenttreatmentcentre. UTC appointment can be booked by calling 902-295-2983. No walk-ins.

In April 2023, Nova Scotia Health and EHS started a care model where low acuity patients that meet specific criteria and have no transportation could be seen at the UTC. For example, if someone falls, has a fractured wrist and no transportation, they can call 911 and be assessed by EHS. If the fracture is minor, EHS can call the UTC and get an appointment for the patient that day. The model also helps keep ambulances in the community and provides people with the most appropriate level of care without leaving the community.

UTC by the numbers (as of Dec. 31, 2023)

As of Dec. 31, 2023, 5,856 patients have been seen at the UTC.

Of those:

- 1,631 were from Victoria County
- 3,204 were from Cape Breton Regional Municipality (CBRM)
- 446 were from Inverness County/Port Hawkesbury
- 29 were from Richmond County
- 98 were from other areas of Nova Scotia
- 162 were from other provinces

Majority of patients present with UTC appropriate conditions like: respiratory, muscular skeletal concerns (sprains, strains & fractures), earaches, urinary tract infections, sore throat, skin concerns, and more.

What's new at VCMH - staffing and site update

Here's the latest on what's new in staffing and onsite at VCMH:



New additions:

- 1 Clinical Nurse Educator (based in Baddeck)
- 1 new nursing graduate
- 2 Internationally educated nurses (IENS)

Nursing:

3 RNs, 1 LPN and the Clinical Nurse Leader (CNL) have taken new positions with Nova Scotia Health. Of these, several applicants are being reviewed for the CNL position; 2 IENS and 1 new RN grad will move into permanent RN positions, leaving one full-time vacancy that has been posted. The permanent LPN vacancy has been posted.

There is also a temporary full-time position vacancy which will be filled when the RN returns to VCMH.

Diagnostic Imaging, Lab and Rehab Services:

Staffing is at full complement.

In fall 2023, stay interviews were conducted with members of the nursing staff at VCMH. Stay interviews help managers better understand what staff enjoy and dislike about their work, identify opportunities to do things differently and share ideas. Plans are being made to conduct stay interviews with staff in other departments.

VCMH has added new equipment in recent months including two stretchers and over head lights for the UTC, furniture for patient rooms, new chairs for physiotherapy and occupational therapy and two defibrillators. New equipment is now onsite to support medication dispensing and simulation education.



Nova Scotia Health continues to look at ways to maximize existing space and explore offsite space options for services like visiting specialist clinics. A space planning survey has also been done to identify the current and future space needs at the site. The next step is to develop a space plan for the site once survey results are received.

Surveys provide patient feedback on UTC

Patient feedback surveys have been conducted since the UTC opened at VCMH.

As of Dec. 31, 2023, 1,134 surveys were done:

- 99% rated their level of care 8-10 on a scale of 1-10.
- 98% had their immediate health care needs met.
- 97% of respondents said they were always treated with courtesy and respect during their visit.
- 94% of respondents said staff always explained things in a way they could understand during their visit.
- 74% would've gone to a primary care provider (family doctor or nurse practitioner) or emergency department otherwise.
- 66% left with a follow-up plan or recommendation for follow-up care.

VCMH physician update

Due to personal and family reasons, Dr. Colin Bonnar is moving his practice to the North Sydney area.

Dr. Bonnar's patients are being contacted directly by phone with information about location, change of practice and their plan of care. His patients can call 902-794-3301 to make an appointment.



There are currently 5 family physicians in the community who cover 4.5 positions. Dr. Bonnar's relocation leaves a 1.0 physician vacancy in Baddeck. This is in addition to an existing .5 vacancy, which can be increased to 1.0 if needed.

The new vacancy has been added to ongoing physician recruitment efforts. Those efforts are focused on recruiting family physicians to the area, including Victoria County and the Cape Breton Regional Municipality (CBRM).

Care options added outside Baddeck and Victoria County

Since the temporary UTC opened in October 2022, a number of care options have been added to increase access for people outside Baddeck.

Since October 2022, Glace Bay Hospital's emergency department has been open on Mondays and Tuesdays from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. The department will be expanding by opening on Wednesdays from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. when coverage is available.

The Northside UTC has expanded its hours since 2022. It is now open Mondays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays from 8 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. and Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Appointments are booked by phone 902-794-8966 or walk-in.

At Cape Breton Regional Hospital's emergency department, a new physician assistant role has been added to enhance access to patients in the department.

Additional resources have been added at the Sydney and Glace Bay Primary Care clinics to enhance access.

The Cape Breton Newcomer Clinic, established at Cape Breton University in September 2023, provides care for unattached newcomers in the Cape Breton Regional Municipality (CBRM).

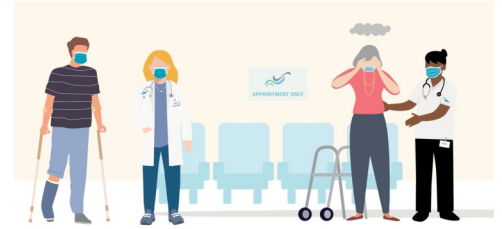
Mobile primary care clinics are held throughout Eastern Zone. These clinics are placed strategically in areas where there are gaps in access to urgent care.

Virtual Care options have also been added across Nova Scotia. **VirtualCareNS** provides people on the Need a Family Practice Registry with online access to a family doctor or nurse practitioner. For more information, visit virtualcarens.ca. **Virtual Care (Maple)** provides Nova Scotians who have a family doctor or nurse practitioner with access to virtual care through Maple. You are eligible for two free visits per year, free of charge through the province of Nova Scotia. Visit app.getmaple.ca/register.

Many community pharmacies have enhanced their services since 2022. Some community pharmacists can assess and prescribe for minor ailments, renew prescriptions and prescribe and inject vaccines/medications. There are also pharmacies that have **Community Pharmacy Primary Care Clinics** where they provide some primary care services at no charge to people with a valid Nova Scotia health card. In Eastern Zone, these clinics can be found in Antigonish, Glace Bay, North Sydney, Port Hawkesbury, and Sydney. To learn more or book an appointment, visit pans.ns.ca/cppcc.

Last year, the YourHealthNS app was launched. It helps people navigate health information, book services and discover care options from their phone or computer. Visit yourhealthns.ca to learn more.

For a full list and more details on "where to go for care in Eastern Zone," visit www.nshealth.ca/documents-and-reports/where-go-health-care-eastern-zone. (Please note: this document is updated quarterly).



Have questions?

If you have questions or feedback you would like to share with the VCMH Working Group, you can email EZengagement@nshealth.ca.

If you are interested in joining the Working Group, please email Andrew Heighton, group chair at andrew.heighton@nshealth.ca.

Priorities and next steps:

- Ongoing physician & staff recruitment
- Continue to explore enhanced access to emergent/urgent services in the community with goal of returning to 24/7 ED coverage
- Work with facilities and space teams to identify priority areas and explore space/program options outside VCMH.