



Northern Rockies Regional Municipality
Municipal Office 5319 - 50th Avenue South
Bag Service 399, Fort Nelson, BC V0C 1R0
Tel 250.774.2541 Fax 250.774.6794
www.NorthernRockies.ca

March 6, 2019

Cathy Ulrich, President & CEO
Northern Health Authority
Suite 600, 299 Victoria Street
Prince George, BC V2L 5B8

Via email: Cathy.Ulrich@northernhealth.ca

Re: Travel Benefits for Maternity Patients

Dear Ms. Ulrich,

Last week, Interior Health made national news in their response to what is anticipated to be a short-term interruption to maternity service in Williams Lake. Their prompt and practical response included measures to ensure that expectant mothers experience no hardship as a result of the requirement to travel to Kamloops (288 km away) to deliver their babies.

As we are well aware, for more than a decade the Northern Rockies Regional Municipality (NRRM) has been without maternity service. The critical impact that the absence of this service has on our community cannot be simply measured by the number of annual births to Fort Nelson mothers. This impact has been clearly and consistently communicated through countless letters, stories shared on behalf of our community members, and direct discussions between yourself and past Councils. At the same time, the NRRM has been actively pursuing opportunities and solutions to improve maternity services for our residents. NRRM-led initiatives have included the subsidized physician housing program in place for over a decade, and more recently, the Community Health Plan process in collaboration with Northern Health and Fort Nelson First Nation.

We have long understood that overcoming challenges related to staffing, physician specialties and privileges are some of the most difficult parts in resurrecting maternity services. That said, there are countless opportunities we have attempted to pursue in tandem to improve the experience for our maternity patients in the absence of a full service. A very obvious opportunity has always been to lessen the financial and emotional burden from mothers and families who have to travel (at minimum 385 km to Fort St. John) to access the nearest facility with maternity service.

We applaud the initiative that Interior Health has taken to address the immediate and real needs of expectant mothers. Their response is appropriate in that the costs (financial, emotional and physical) of a discontinued service should not be borne solely

by the patient and their family. Our Fort Nelson First Nation partners in the Community Health Plan also have programs in place for their community to ensure that where services must be accessed outside Fort Nelson, the patient experiences no financial hardship to do so. These examples, in our minds, present an opportunity for Fort Nelson residents that cannot be overlooked.

To that end, Regional Council would like to understand:

- Is a medical travel program (providing for travel, food & accommodations) something within the purview of Health Authorities in BC?
- Is the funding for such a program provided for at the Provincial or regional (Health Authority) level?
- By what formal means should the NRRM be pursuing equitable access to health services for our residents, to realize any and all opportunities to reduce the hardship for travel where required for services afar, and returning all services practicably possible locally?

I look forward to your response and would invite you to visit Fort Nelson in the coming months for a formal introduction with myself and Council to discuss this, and other, health care issues that are important to our community.

Sincerely,
Northern Rockies Regional Municipality



Gary Foster, Mayor

Cc:

Colleen Nyce, Chair
Northern Health Authority
Suite 600, 299 Victoria Street
Prince George, BC V2L 5B8
c/o desa.chipman@northernhealth.ca

Honourable Adrian Dix, Minister of Health
PO Box 9050, STN PROV GOVT
Victoria, BC V8W 9E2
HLTH.Minister@gov.bc.ca

Mr. Bob Zimmer, Member of Parliament
Prince George-Peace River-Northern Rockies
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6
Bob.Zimmer@parl.gc.ca

Dan Davies, Member of the Legislative Assembly –
Peace River North
Parliament Buildings
Victoria, BC V8V 1X4
dan.davies.MLA@leg.bc.ca