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Media Release

Achieving Equitable Access to Health Services with a Northern Rockies Health Advocate

FORT NELSON – In March 2020, Regional Council for the Northern Rockies Regional Municipality (NRRM) sought requests for proposals for a Regional Health Advocate to develop and implement a strategy to influence policy development and service delivery with the intent of achieving equitable access to health care for the local community.

For more than a decade, the NRRM has worked hard to maintain health services in the Northern Rockies. Still, the region has experienced an erosion of locally accessible health services as Provincial and Regional Health Authority mandates have shifted to regionalize services to larger centers, protocols of practice have become increasingly stringent, and filling vacancies has been significantly challenging as a result of shortages in trained health care professionals and the competitiveness in recruitment. Because of Fort Nelson’s geographic isolation, residents of the NRRM often experience significant burdens in accessing health services including high costs, frequent long-distance travel, extended wait times for appointments and significant numbers of referrals for services that residents in other communities do not.

“Over the course of many years, Council has taken every available opportunity to address the barriers in accessing health services at the political level, though we have not gained the amount of traction we would like” says Mayor Gary Foster.

While the NRRM has also worked to ensure that the community has been represented by participating in research and work of agencies such as the Rural Coordination Centre of BC, the Centre for Rural Health Research (UBC) the University of Northern British Columbia, and others, change has been slow to follow.

In light of Regional Council’s strong desire to improve health services locally, Doug Blackie of Doug Blackie Consulting has been selected as the Northern Rockies Regional Health Advocate to provide strategic guidance informed through meetings and interviews with key stakeholders and by his extensive experience in rural healthcare.

“We’re excited to work with Regional Council and its regional and provincial partners to start a new conversation about sustaining and growing health services for the Northern Rockies and ensuring people in northeastern BC have equitable access to care when they need it” says Doug Blackie.

The development of a Northern Rockies Health Advocacy Strategy will engage key community stakeholders throughout the process to hear stories, lived experience and understand the context of health services in order to identify go-forward actions and priorities.

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