



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
of BRITISH COLUMBIA



October 20, 2021

By email and surface mail

Hon. Adrian Dix
Minister of Health
Room 337, Parliament Buildings
Victoria, BC V8V 1X4

Dear Sir,

Re: Mackenzie Town Hall

Further to our discussions regarding the health care situation in Mackenzie, I am forwarding to you concerns brought forward by some of the residents of Mackenzie during my Townhall there October 13, 2021.

It was brought to my attention that since the downturn of forest related industries in Mackenzie, many seniors have been choosing to make Mackenzie their home. This has resulted in an increase in demand for health-related services. Unfortunately, this has come at the same time those services have taken a downturn due to various factors but largely due to a decline in available registered nurses. Some nurses have left Mackenzie along with their families due to lack of work in the forest sector.

As a result of lack of Registered Nurses to cover shifts at the Mackenzie Hospital, the emergency ward has been increasingly shut down and patients diverted to other hospitals upwards of 2 hours' drive away. Some of these other facilities are also faced with numerous diversion shutdowns of their emergency departments. This has had the unintended consequence of stretching the ambulance service in Mackenzie and surrounding area beyond its capacity as well. Just recently my office dealt with a situation where a patient experiencing heart issues was brought to the Mackenzie hospital and his family was instructed to go into the parking lot and phone for an ambulance. An ambulance was not available right away due to intervening emergencies. There have been many other situations experienced by families in Mackenzie where their loved ones were not able to access timely health care in an emergency.

The people of Mackenzie are relying on ambulance services for emergency situations at a time when there is a huge gap in services available at the Mackenzie Hospital, yet the news release

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regarding upgrade to ambulance services made September 14, 2021 does not include Mackenzie in the conversion to full-time staffing. It does however include communities such as Chetwynd and Fort St. James here in the north in spite of the fact that these are smaller communities and are under an hour away from other emergency services while Mackenzie is a 2 hour drive away. Was this an oversight and is there any intent to improve this situation?

The people of Mackenzie have suffered a continued erosion of services available in their community including the ability to have their children born close to home as well as surgical interventions. The continual shutdown of emergency services at the hospital is an even more immediate concern. They are asking why there are not more trained nurses available and why are there are no incentives for them to practice in the north including loan forgiveness programs as well as Northern Living Allowance.

The communities of Fort St. James, Chetwynd and Mackenzie have populations of 1,598, 2,503 and 3,700 respectively and allegedly have varying levels of service. However, a search of their webpages does not offer a comprehensive list of services that are in fact currently available at each of these sites and I have asked for an update from Northern Health. There was a concern raised at the Townhall that Mackenzie was lagging behind in spite of being a larger community.

Another concern brought forward was the level of ambulance services available in Mackenzie which unlike Chetwynd and Fort St. James, is a 2-hour drive away for anything besides basic emergency treatment including maternal deliveries. Mackenzie does not appear to be included in the announcement made September 14, 2021, regarding enhanced ambulance hiring in which communities such as Chetwynd and Fort St. James are provided with 8 fulltime paramedic positions. I have asked BC Ambulance Services for a list of their services in all 3 communities as well as Vanderhoof.

The people of Mackenzie had many questions, concerns and proposals at the Townhall that I hope to discuss with you in a meeting shortly. One of the proposals put forward by one constituent was whether it might be time to call in the army to provide some relief. This shows the level of concern in the community that someone will die without sufficient emergency care.

I ask that you look into the healthcare situation in Mackenzie immediately and find ways to address the gaps in care that appear to be occurring there. I look forward to hearing back from you at your earliest opportunity.

Sincerely,



MIKE MORRIS MLA
Prince George-Mackenzie

cc Mayor Joan Atkinson
District of Mackenzie