

Sept 11, 2020 | Rural Health Concerns

Tune in here for updates on how our community is defending our hospital and healthcare system.

Putting Rural Health at the Center of 2020 NB Election

The 6 Mayors representing the communities affected by planned Hospital service closures have put together several initiatives to make Rural Healthcare an election issue. The ill-conceived health care reforms that would result in closures at rural community hospitals, affecting, in particular, emergency and acute care services were brought to the attention of candidates in all NB ridings in two ways:

All-Candidate Survey

An online survey called “6 Questions from 6 Rural Mayors” was distributed to every candidate we could reach. The survey contained questions about the need to: completely revoke the proposed reforms; consider changes to the leadership of the health authorities; ask for a commitment that healthcare professionals could freely provide their perspective; asked for a commitment to wider consultations including rural residents and indigenous communities; demand that any public process would have access to data and; that any proposed reforms would examine the impact on local and provincial levels, and that any potential issues identified would be addressed in advance to ensure healthcare delivery is not compromised.

Op-Ed Piece

This op-ed ran in several Brunswick newspapers and was co-authored by John Higham, Mayor of Sackville and Marianne Bell, Mayor of Perth-Andover.

ALL NEW BRUNSWICKERS DESERVE QUALITY, EFFECTIVE HEALTHCARE

We are all New Brunswickers. Just over half of us live within metropolitan areas, the other 48% live in the counties, villages, towns and small cities outside of those areas. Regardless of where we live, ALL New Brunswickers deserve – and pay taxes for – quality and efficient healthcare, delivered in a caring and timely manner.

This last February, the former PC government and its respective health authorities announced a series of ill-conceived closures of rural hospital services, in emergency and acute care in particular, without plans in place to accommodate the healthcare needs of the communities left behind.

As the plan’s failings became evident, the Higgs government had the good sense to cancel the plan and pledge to a series of community consultations

to better prepare for a healthcare solution that took into account the needs of rural New Brunswickers.

February's announcement brought all leaders in impacted communities to speak as one voice about the closures in our communities. While we were not elected by 48% of New Brunswick's voters; our towns, villages and counties share the same needs, desires and concerns of rural New Brunswickers throughout the province. We think our cumulative voice counts for something important in this election.

First, we, and rural New Brunswickers, ask for the explicit commitment of each party leader and candidate that the service closure plan introduced in February 2020 be permanently shelved.

Second, all New Brunswickers realize that healthcare is continually evolving, with new treatments, technologies, and medicines delivering possibilities only dreamt of a few years ago. But as our healthcare system evolves, those of us paying for it and being served by it must all have a voice as possibilities and priorities are debated and decided.

Future improvements to healthcare delivery must be based on a comprehensive vision, intelligent strategies and well-thought-out implementation plan for urban AND rural communities. Especially in the cases of emergency and acute care, when those of us who pay for the system need it most.

Our health authorities state the following among their values:

Horizon: "We show empathy, compassion and respect." "We act with integrity and are accountable."

Vitalité: "We protect people's dignity. We show openness and willingness to listen and we promote dialogue." "We are transparent, responsible and accountable for our actions."

While we have utmost respect for the doctors and staff who work within both systems, in our opinion, the leadership of neither authority lived up to these values in the planning, communication, transparency, or implementation stages when announcing their February services-reduction plans.

With our faith in both Boards challenged, we see that the ultimate responsibility for delivering effective and efficient healthcare services to

all New Brunswickers resides with the political leaders of our province. So we ask each party leader and every candidate for provincial office to commit unequivocally to permanently revoking the February 2020 services-reduction plan, and in turn, to commit to meaningful consultation and transparency so that future healthcare changes can be investigated and implemented.

Further, we ask each party leader and candidate to also commit that any future changes will, at the very least maintain, and in fact will aim to improve service levels and health outcomes for all residents of the province. The half of us who live in rural New Brunswick want to be a part of the solution alongside those in metropolitan areas. A poorly-thought out and executed rural health services plan, like what was proposed last February, would have also negatively affect urban areas whose facilities and resources who will face even more pressure than they do today.

Hesitation on the part of party leaders (and candidates) to promise and deliver upon meaningful and transparent consultations, and to commit to maintaining healthcare outcomes and delivery across the province, would signal a lack of caring for rural New Brunswickers and comfort with a two-tiered healthcare system in our province.

We look forward to discussing these two important commitments with you each in person, as well as laying the groundwork for a longer-term vision for rural health care delivery.

Rural Health Concerns is published by a group of engaged citizens [CONTACT US](#)