

News Release

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From: Memramcook-Tantramar Community Task Force

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Student Healthcare a Special Concern in Sackville

Many volunteers are at work in our Rural Health Action Group, inspiring, directing and informing, with voices from across our whole region. Here are some heartfelt and grounded concerns from Action Group member, Hannah Ehler, who is Vice-president, External Affairs, of the Mount Allison Students Union [MASU].

Reductions in emergency and acute care services at our regional hospital can have wider ramifications than simply health. The population of Sackville increases fully 50 per cent, September through April, due to more than 2,300 Mount Allison University students. Their presence is a vital contributor to the economic, cultural, and social life of the community. And although their stay may be temporary, their need for access to services — including healthcare — is equal to that of any full-time residents.

Ms. Ehler points out that “The steady relocation of healthcare services from Sackville to Moncton uniquely impacts current students and future student recruitment, and the MASU wants to be part of the overarching solution.”

“The student experience has always been unique,” she writes. “Whether living in residence or off-campus, many have no access to a vehicle to get them to Moncton in an after-hours medical emergency. Students can always call 911, and thankfully our MASU insurance covers the \$1,500 round-trip in an ambulance. Yet, how are students without cars expected to reach services in the event of an urgent but non-emergency situation? Nobody wants to tie up an ambulance that could be needed for a real emergency; but neither does anyone want to spend the night in pain and fear, waiting for the Sackville emergency room to open.

“Few Mount Allison students have a local family doctor. While the campus Wellness Centre provides some resources, a physician is only available to students twice a month. Prior to the evening closures, students often treated the Sackville emergency room as a walk-in clinic for health concerns ranging from infections and rashes to mental stress or sexual violence. While telephone consultation is available, the fact remains that after 4pm, there is nowhere in Sackville where alarming cases can get immediate attention.

“University sports are a staple for campus and community alike. And, as the risk of injury is a natural component of strenuous activity, the elimination of evening and weekend emergency services in Sackville has brought with it a back-of-mind anxiety that preys on the mental health of athletes. Will visiting teams consider Sackville as the right destination if the right services are not available? Will Homecoming Weekend be the same if hospital services continue to be inaccessible?”

Hannah Ehler’s perspectives are welcomed and affirmed by Rural Health Action Group co-chairs John Higham and Pat Estabrooks and emphasize the need for speedy solutions to the service reductions.

“Active student participation is one part of our larger efforts to collaborate with Horizon Health to return full-time healthcare to our community. We are already seeing results as Horizon adjusts its approach to professional recruitment, and now seeks to involve local people’s ideas and efforts” says Higham. “Recruitment success is the initial step that will allow us to collaboratively address many other issues, including the health and safety of students.”