



24 June 2022

## **Task Force Update - Rural Health Action Group**

A team of a dozen+ people from across Memramcook-Tantramar have been working diligently in many areas to address healthcare gaps, and especially the risk of hospital closure and loss of further services at the Sackville Memorial Hospital. Here is a brief update of some of our work.

Co-chaired by former Mayors of Sackville, Pat Estabrooks and John Higham, the Rural Health Action Group now has a 'formal collaborative relationship' with Horizon Health Network (HHN) representatives as we work toward shared priorities on healthcare.

### **Attracting and hiring nurses and physicians:**

A major barrier to having adequate local healthcare services is medical and nursing staff. So, one key area of work, supported financially by the Town of Sackville, is the marketing of the Sackville Memorial Hospital and our region to prospective nurses and doctors. Both Sackville and HHN have strategic plans for this. HHN has a generic plan for attracting staff, focused more widely on the HHN overall. Sackville has a community recruitment website that showcases the region and then links prospective applicants to the HHN website for more employment details.

Further costs for our shared recruitment efforts will be split between the Town of Sackville and HHN. This is great because we had planned on doing something as a community to drive traffic to our recruitment site, but by working together, we can benefit from a bigger budget, get the full expertise of Horizon's marketing department and have access to their recruitment data and creative team!

### **Ensuring our services meet our needs:**

Another priority of the Rural Health Action Group is healthcare services re-design. Our Services Design Working Group (SDWG) includes community volunteers (many are skilled retired healthcare professionals) and HHN representatives. Resources are also being contributed by the Sackville Memorial Hospital and the Rural Community Health Initiative.

Goals for the SDWG include:

- Restoration of services at the Sackville Memorial Hospital
- Completing a focused consultation with regional health services to identify gaps and opportunities to improve health outcomes
- Developing recommendations for potential innovative initiatives and solutions that involve local partners to improve approaches to rural healthcare, preventative health measures and health outcomes.

All are working hard, looking at September to reach their objectives. We are grateful for the commitment of all parties, and that this small group is holding high values and goals together in this work. We feel our efforts have been recognized, as the province is now consulting on ways to make local content a more permanent feature of Health Services.

Other Rural Health Action Group activities have included advocating for more internationally-trained nursing and medical staff, for modified approaches to staffing the local ER, and for new and ongoing ways to show our gratitude for our constant and caring local nursing and medical staff.

Pat Estabrooks and John Higham, co-chairs