

Report for Municipalities from RHAG Steering Committee
July 21, 2023

The Rural Health Action Group (RHAG) Steering Committee met on July 20th, with 12 people present representing Tantramar and Strait Shores, Mount Allison University, MASU, Sackville Memorial Hospital Foundation, SMH Auxiliary and the wider community. Updates were provided by RHAG representatives on emerging RHAG-HHN Working Groups: Primary Care, Ambulatory Care and Community Engagement. These Groups are to ensure that the priorities for our region are being implemented, through the development and oversight of agreed-upon work plans. Upon approval of joint project documents for each topic, the Committees will meet regularly to share information, achieve priorities and address new and emerging issues.

The recent public meeting, hosted by MLA Mitton on July 18th, with Horizon CEO, Margaret Melanson and several members of her team, was discussed. This meeting attracted more than 100 citizens, and many questions and concerns were responded to. The meeting was recorded and is available online through CHMA.

In September, an interim Primary Care Clinic will be set up at the Sackville Medical Centre, to provide services for the most needy patients of Dr. Wall and Dr. Johnston, who are closing their practices in August. You will be contacted directly if you are to be included in this group of patients. This Clinic is expected to be a first step toward a type of Primary Care called the “Patient Medical Home” model, that will ensure patients get timely access to the kind of care they need, through access to a healthcare team in a clinic setting. More on this is to come from the joint working group.

Horizon is advertising to hire a new Nurse Practitioner for the Port Elgin Health Centre, to improve local access there. RHAG has noted that additional space will also be required at the clinic.

On July 7th, the Horizon Health Network sent out an update on Beal University, that expects to welcome students in early 2024. The Sackville Memorial Hospital is undergoing renovations for this nursing school, while maintaining its 21 acute and long term care beds, ER services, etc. Some community health services are being moved out of the hospital, but are expected to be relocated somewhere else in the local community.

Horizon is offering cash rewards for those who successfully refer a nurse or physician to them for hiring. Horizon has hired new staff to work especially on physician recruitment, following levels of success abating the crisis over nursing shortages. We are considering supporting a presence by Tantramar/Strait Shores at a Fall family medicine retreat in NB, to assist with the recruitment of physicians to our area.

Other topics of concern being monitored and addressed through the RHAG Steering Committee include ambulance services, communication of healthcare information across Tantramar and Strait Shores, lack of representation and voice on the new Horizon Health Board of Directors, local housing constraints for new healthcare staff and Beal University students, and membership on the UMN Health Committee.

Given the complexity of healthcare changes and challenges, the community’s collaboration with HHN provides ways to bring local volunteers and voices into the multiple processes, to ensure the best services and outcomes for our community.

Our next meeting will be August 24th