

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Aberdeen Health Foundation supports library programs across Pictou County

A \$130,000 funding commitment will support expanded library programming across all six Pictou County branches, helping reduce isolation and improve population health.

New Glasgow, Nova Scotia, Friday, December 19, 2025, As the holiday season settles over Pictou County, libraries across the area are preparing for a new chapter of community programming designed to bring people together, reducing isolation in support of overall wellbeing. This Christmas, the Aberdeen Health Foundation is pleased to share news of funding to enhance programs for the upcoming year at all six Pictou County branches of the Pictou-Antigonish Regional Library (PARL) through the Healthy Libraries - Healthy Communities initiative.



(HI RES IMAGE AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST)

Photo caption: Representatives from the Aberdeen Health Foundation and the Pictou-Antigonish Regional Library (PARL) gathered to mark the Foundation's \$130,000 investment in the Healthy Libraries – Healthy Communities initiative. This funding will support expanded programming across all six PARL locations in Pictou County, with a focus on reducing social isolation and strengthening community wellbeing. **From left to right:** Michelle Ferris, Executive Director of the Aberdeen Health Foundation; Town of New Glasgow Councillor Clyde Fraser, PARL Board Chair; Town of Trenton Deputy Mayor Nicole LeBlanc, PARL Board Vice Chair; and Eric Stackhouse, PARL Chief Librarian. Missing from the photo on behalf of the Aberdeen Health Foundation are Heather MacDonald, Board Chair, and Dr. Pat Craig, Population Health Committee Chair.

For many residents, the local library is already much more than a place to borrow books. It's a welcoming space where people connect and find support. But as PARL Chief Librarian Eric Stackhouse explains, the scope of what libraries can offer is often shaped by limited resources. "Our entire annual programming budget for the two counties is only \$10,000. Library staff do a great job with what they have, but this is a real game-changer. We are very excited to offer some new programming that will focus on isolation, mental health, and education."

The Foundation's \$130,000 investment, over its 2025 and 2026 fiscal years, will support a wide range of programming across Pictou County, strengthening existing offerings and creating new initiatives that respond to community needs. The funding will help enhance familiar programs like family story times, reading clubs, and social groups like knitting circles. Planned programming includes cooking and literacy programs for families, art and music workshops for people with sight loss, conversation circles for newcomers, and monthly library clubs that combine social connection with practical health and wellness learning. "What makes this funding so special is that we can really offer programs and experiences that will impact people's lives, health and wellbeing," says Stackhouse. "We just can't thank the Foundation enough."

A key part of the initiative is removing barriers that prevent people from participating in community life. For some older adults, the challenge is not interest or willingness, but transportation. New monthly library clubs launching in four Pictou County branches are designed to address that gap directly. Participants will be picked up at their door, spend time socializing, learning, and taking part in creative and informational activities, and then be brought home again. The aim, Stackhouse explains, is to really reach people who feel isolated in their lives and ensure that access is not a limiting factor.

Reducing social isolation is a central focus of this health initiative, informed by insights from 2024 Personal Empowerment Program (PEP) results. PEP was a six-month pilot program, funded by the Aberdeen Health Foundation and delivered in Pictou County in partnership with Dalhousie University researchers. The program supported 172 participants living with chronic conditions and focused on building healthier habits through lifestyle changes, mental health support, and community connection. Dr. Pat Craig, Chair of the Aberdeen Health Foundation's Population Health Committee, says the results reinforced what was already known locally. "The findings from the PEP study confirmed what we already expected," she explains. "Even in a place like Pictou County, where we pride ourselves on community connections, social isolation is a significant problem. It has a huge negative effect on mental health, and in the senior population in particular, it is a risk factor for dementia."

Libraries are uniquely positioned to support this kind of connection. "Libraries are accessible in terms of location and hours," says Dr. Craig. "More and more, they are becoming community hubs. The success of the Virtual Care @ Your Library initiative also showed us what a valuable role libraries can play in supporting health care."

Virtual Care @ Your Library is a partnership between the Aberdeen Health Foundation, Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage, Nova Scotia Health, and the Pictou-Antigonish Regional Library. Through the program, residents can use library-provided technology and private space to connect with Family Doctors and Nurse Practitioners through virtual care platforms, with library staff available to help them get set up and navigate the process.

“Public libraries support the key determinants of health,” says Stackhouse. “We bridge the economic divide, offering free access to education, technology, and inspiration regardless of age, ability, background, or income. We provide safe, non-judgmental spaces to everyone, whatever their needs.”

That environment can be especially meaningful for people who feel disconnected elsewhere. “We have been told many times that interaction with library staff is sometimes the only social contact people have in their day,” says Stackhouse. “We are proud to play that critical role in society.”

The Healthy Libraries investment caps off a year in which the Aberdeen Health Foundation has invested more than \$3 million in local health care initiatives across Pictou County, supported by the generosity of donors and the commitment of Foundation staff and volunteer Board Members.

“This initiative really reflects how we approach health today, looking beyond medical care to the conditions that help people stay well,” says Heather MacDonald, Aberdeen Health Foundation Board Chair. “As we prepare to celebrate our 40th anniversary in the new year, it’s a chance for us to look back on how the Foundation has evolved, from our early focus on funding hospital equipment to a broader commitment to the factors that shape health in our communities. Libraries play an important role in that work, and during this season of connection and gratitude, I’m thankful that we can support them as a key pillar in strengthening wellbeing for the people of Pictou County.”

The Aberdeen Health Foundation is the leading charity for enhancing health care in Pictou County. In 2025, the Foundation invested over \$3 million to fund medical equipment and enhance health programs at the Aberdeen Hospital and in the community. Your contribution can be the catalyst for even greater change — find out how you can make an impact [here](#).

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