

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Reducing Barriers to Virtual Care in Pictou County

(Pictou County, February 18, 2022) Pictou-Antigonish Regional Library, the Aberdeen Health Foundation and Nova Scotia Health have launched a pilot project to help people in Pictou County access virtual care. Known as *Virtual Care @Your Library*, this project is part of each organization's commitment to improving health equity by reducing barriers to services and resources.

There are now computers and mobile devices connected to broadband for people to use at three of the libraries in Pictou County – New Glasgow, River John and Westville. These devices are set up in safe and secure rooms for confidential virtual appointments.

Additionally, the library staff have been trained on the virtual care technology and processes.

“Everyone working at these libraries is very excited about this pilot project because it is an opportunity to provide people with direct assistance accessing virtual care,” said Eric Stackhouse, Chief Librarian at Pictou-Antigonish Regional Library. “It is part of our commitment to making health care and other services more accessible.”

There are currently over 10,000 people in Pictou County who do not have a primary care provider and are on the Need a Family Practice Registry. They have been sent an invitation to sign up for VirtualCareNS.

VirtualCareNS is an innovative virtual program that enables people on the Need a Family Practice Registry to access a family doctor or nurse practitioner online through a computer or mobile device.

For people who may experience barriers accessing virtual care appointments, from comfort using technology to not owning a computer or having internet, the library staff can help. They can assist people who are having trouble signing up for VirtualCareNS, and with logging into the app.

The rooms can also be used by people who have a virtual appointment scheduled with their family physician, nurse practitioner, or specialist.

“Our goal is to make sure that technology is not a barrier to accessing primary health care,” said Michelle Ferris, Executive Director of the Aberdeen Health Foundation. “The Foundation has a particular interest in investing for equity in access to health services and worked to bring these partners together to further its vision of a Pictou County where every person has the opportunity to attain their best health.”

Nova Scotia Health's Innovation Hub will be assisting the Pictou-Antigonish Regional Library to evaluate this proof-of-concept program to identify what type of supports people need to access virtual care, including having a reliable internet connection, access to smart devices, and technical assistance. Through this evaluation, if people indicate that they see a value in accessing virtual care services in a community location, there is potential for expansion of this program over time to additional communities.

“Over the past two years, we have seen positive results from the implementation of innovative, virtual care solutions for Nova Scotians. Having community-based support at libraries in Pictou County to access VirtualCareNS and other virtual care appointments with health care providers is an important option for those experiencing challenges using virtual care from home,” said Dr. Gail Tomblin Murphy, vice president of Research, Innovation and Discovery, and Chief Nurse

Executive at Nova Scotia Health. “We are pleased to be a partner to establish this much-needed service, and we look forward to learning about patients’ experience with this new program at the library.”

Residents of Pictou County can pre-book space and technology for virtual appointments at the libraries in New Glasgow, River John and Westville by telephone, through email, or by stopping by in person. The Virtual Care@Your Library program is a free service for the public.



PHOTO CAPTION: Sheila Newell-Fagan, Branch Assistant at the Westville Library (left) is assisting library patron, Albert MacDonald (right) with accessing Virtual Care online.

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