

New Glasgow, Nova Scotia, Thursday, November 28, 2024, On December 9th, the Pictou County Community Health Centre (PCCHC) will open its doors at 25B Front Street in downtown Pictou. Situated near the food bank and pharmacy in an accessible building, the Centre reflects what can be achieved when a community comes together with a shared vision for better health.

The CHC will be open to the public three days a week, including evening hours, with a full-time community health worker and a program developer on staff, as well as support from the Pictou-Antigonish Regional Library's (PARL) virtual care technician one day a week, ensuring flexible and accessible services.

Supported by the Aberdeen Health Foundation and the Department of Health and Wellness, this initiative is the result of years of collaboration, research, and a commitment to addressing gaps in local health care.

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Photo caption: Susan MacConnell (left), Executive Director and Anne Simmonds (right), Chair of the Board of Directors of the new Pictou County Community Health Centre (PCCHC) in downtown Pictou. The CHC, set to open in December, will provide flexible and accessible health care services tailored to the needs of the community, beginning with a partnership with the Pictou-Antigonish Regional Library's Virtual Care @ Your Library program.

“This isn’t just about providing health care,” says Susan MacConnell, the CHC’s Executive Director. “It’s about creating a place where everyone, especially those who’ve been left out by the traditional system, can feel supported and empowered to improve their health.” The CHC focuses on low-barrier access to health care for people who often face systemic challenges. This could involve connecting someone with a primary care provider through virtual care, helping them navigate social services, or providing connections to existing resources for food, housing, or mental health support. Instead of focusing on predefined programming, the Centre aims to maintain its flexibility to address unexpected challenges that residents may face. “Maybe someone needs access to health care but they don’t have a health card,” Susan explains. “So it may be that we help them through that process and go from there.”

This unique aspect of the CHC is a key reason the Aberdeen Health Foundation is behind it. “Investing in the CHC allows us to address the factors that affect people’s health and prevent them from accessing the care they need,” says Michelle Ferris, Executive Director of the Foundation. This initiative also reflects the Foundation’s focus on population health, which seeks to prevent illness arising from broader issues like housing, food security, and mental health. “Our mission is to build healthier communities by recognizing these challenges and working to improve health outcomes for everyone,” Ferris explains.

The journey to bring the CHC to life began in 2018, when a small group of community members identified unmet needs across Pictou County. They envisioned a more holistic approach to primary care that considers all aspects of a person’s life, moving beyond simply treating illness. With support from the Aberdeen Health Foundation and the Sutherland Harris Foundation, the group developed a business plan and spent the following years turning their vision into reality. Over time, the working group evolved into a dedicated board of directors, composed of individuals with expertise in governance, public health, community services, and nonprofit leadership. Together, they have shaped the Centre’s operational plan, programs, and policies.

“We have an extraordinary group,” says Susan. “Anne, our Chair, has over 40 years of experience as a nurse and a PhD in nursing. She’s brilliant, deeply committed to research and evaluation, and ensures we base everything we do on real community needs.” Susan emphasizes the diversity of the board’s expertise, “The depth of experience on this board is incredible. They’ve all had a hand in getting the CHC to where it is today.”

Anne Simmonds, the Chair of the Board, shares her excitement about the CHC’s mission. “For me, the most exciting part is creating a space where people feel like they belong. When

someone walks through our doors, they'll be met with compassion and respect. They'll know they're not just a number—they matter.”

The decision to locate the CHC in Pictou was a thoughtful one. “We originally thought New Glasgow, because of the population density,” Susan explains. “But after seeing the need in Pictou and realizing that many services didn't follow people who moved across the causeway during COVID, it became clear Pictou was where we needed to be.”

For Susan, the role of Executive Director marked a turning point in her career. Having been inspired by the CHC's planning stages as a volunteer with the Aberdeen Health Foundation, Susan felt a deep connection to its success. “When the executive director role was posted, I knew I wanted someone to take that position who could bring the CHC from planning stages to reality. I was about to send the job posting to a friend when I thought, I will be so envious of whoever takes this role on. That's when I realized I should be applying for this role myself!”

As part of its launch, the CHC will roll out a six-month pilot project that includes virtual care, developed in partnership with PARL. The project includes a dedicated virtual care room, staffed one day a week by the Virtual Care @ Your Library technician in collaboration with the CHC's full-time community health worker. Residents can receive assistance with tasks such as connecting to virtual appointments, accessing food resources, or learning how to book blood work online. “We always knew that we wanted to be working in partnership, whether for our initial launch or moving forward,” says Anne. “The library was the perfect fit. They were operating a successful virtual health program and were looking to do more outreach. For us, it was about addressing the social determinants of health for the people who come in, not just connecting them with primary care but helping them navigate the system as well.”

“This pilot is about meeting people where they are,” Anne adds. “It's not just about addressing immediate needs but understanding the bigger picture and helping people find long-term solutions.”

The CHC invites the community to explore the space and meet the team at an open house on December 9th, from 1 to 3 p.m. and 5 to 7 p.m. While the opening is a significant milestone, Susan and Anne see it as just the beginning. Over the next year, the Centre will engage the community through conversations and feedback, using that input to shape future programs and services. A key part of this process will be led by the program developer, Lynn Langille, who will work closely with local communities to identify their needs and create targeted initiatives to promote health and well-being.

“We don’t want to assume we know what people need,” says Anne. “This Centre belongs to the people of Pictou County. We’re here to listen and respond.” For Susan, the CHC represents more than accessible health care. “This Centre isn’t just about filling gaps,” she said. “It’s about creating a space where people feel valued, where they know someone cares. That’s the heart of what we’re doing here.” Above all, the goal is to foster a sense of belonging and trust that will hopefully extend beyond the CHC to the broader health care system. As it opens its doors, the Centre is poised to become a vital resource for Pictou County residents, paving the way for an inclusive and responsive model of health care for all.

The Pictou County Community Health Centre team invites you to the open house on December 9th, from 1 to 3 p.m. and 5 to 7 p.m., at 25B Front Street, Pictou. Drop in to explore the space, meet the dedicated team behind this initiative, and learn more about how the CHC aims to make a difference in our community. Everyone is welcome!

The Aberdeen Health Foundation is the leading charity for enhancing health care in Pictou County. In 2023, the Foundation invested over \$2 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](#).

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

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