

News Release

Princeton Community Health Table

Saturday, September 25

In response to growing concerns with mental health and substance use services, the Support Our Health Care (SOHC) Society has formed the Princeton Community Health Table (PCHT).

On June 29 & 30, 2020 members of SOHC participated in the BC Rural and First Nations Health and Wellness Conference. It included over 900 participants from around the province.

Our cohort focused on mental health and substance use issues. It was from this productive collaborative discussion that the PCHT originated.

Various barriers have been identified to accessing mental health and addictions services in rural communities. Transportation acts as a barrier, as there are limited options to get from rural areas to facilities located in urban cities that offer the services needed. Costs associated with transportation, food, travel, and accommodation to access those facilities may not be affordable for some service users. Further, the current availability of information may not be sufficient to direct community members to the services they need. Communication platforms that advertise information on where to access services are needed in sites that will reach populations that are at increased risk of mental health challenges. It also appears that stigmatization around mental health treatment plays a role in the barriers to accessing treatment, particularly in communities where the small population size has the potential to reduce the level of confidentiality between service providers and service users. Finally, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic decreases access to services, and has resulted in the need for social distancing. This puts individuals at risk of isolation and related mental health challenges such as stress, anxiety, and depression, amongst others.

The goal of the PCHT is to improve access to mental health and substance use services for people living in Princeton and surrounding area. The group aims to include key stakeholders in projects that address the root causes of mental illness and improve access to mental health and addiction services in the community. To accomplish this the group plans to review the community's current resources and determine a path forward together to address current and new challenges.

The PCHT held its third meeting on Thursday, September 24 where the group developed prioritized action items and identified volunteers to work on the delivery of an action plan. Participants included the Assistant Superintendent of School District No. 58 (Nicola-Similkameen), the Executive Director of Princeton and District Community Services, the President of the Princeton Metis Society, a health researcher from UBC Okanagan, members of the Support Our Health Care Board of Directors, and other stakeholders from the Princeton community.

Representatives who have agreed to participate but were unable to attend include the Executive Director of Princeton Family Services Society, the Nurse Manager of Princeton General Hospital, and a student representative from Princeton Secondary School.

The PCHT hopes to expand the group to include participants from local government, healthcare practitioners, the RCMP, and people with lived experience.