

[Subscribe](#)[Past Issues](#)[Translate](#) ▼

BCRHN
British Columbia
Rural Health Network

June 2024 Edition

Spotlight on Essential Rural Travel Services

In this edition, we highlight the remarkable services being provided to rural residents, ensuring access to care across remote areas of British Columbia. Amidst challenges such as limited primary care attachments, closed emergency rooms, lengthy waitlists, and decades of declining transportation options, these services have become indispensable. We urgently need to expand these services, garner full political support, and ensure that no patient is left behind.

You'll discover highlights from various programs and the incredible work of our Member of the Month, Helicopters without Borders, which is reaching some of the most underserved and challenging regions in our province.

Additionally, we shine a spotlight on Hope Air, the only pan-provincial, pan-Canadian charity dedicated to helping people reach care with their no-patient-left-behind policy. Supported by our Provincial government, Hope Air has experienced a 250% increase in demand as awareness has grown in rural communities. While they have robust funding for oncology travel services, due to recent investment by the Province, they require much more Government support for their other programs to assist all rural residents, regardless of diagnosis.

We are profoundly grateful for Hope Air's support of the BC Rural Health Network and their commitment to aiding those most in need. Without their services, many individuals would not have access to necessary care. Last year, Hope Air raised and donated over \$1 million for travel provisions in BC, but as demand continues to soar, they need further support.

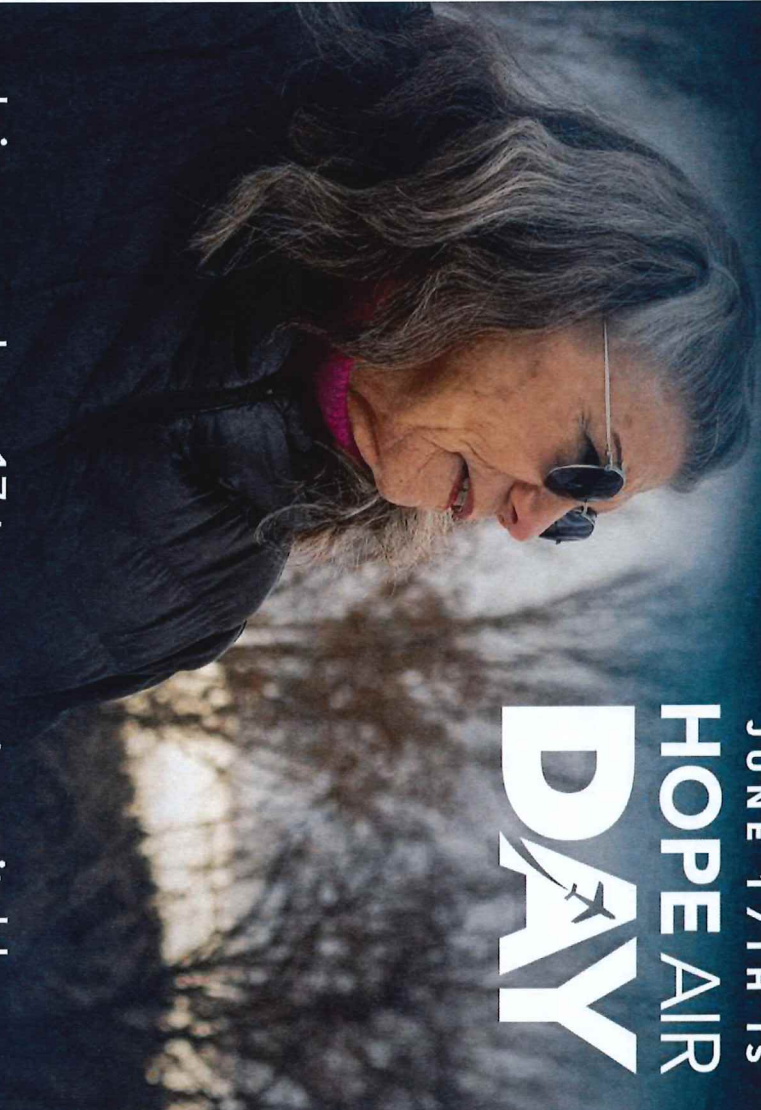
If you can contribute, please do. Please write to your MLA and request full support for comprehensive travel assistance in BC.

[Subscribe](#)

[Past Issues](#)


[Translate](#) ▼

need, regardless of where you live or if you can't afford to travel. We're committed to easing the stress of getting there by providing families with free flights and accommodations. If you're someone in need or know someone who is, apply online or by phone to Hope Air and begin the process of getting free travel assistance.



**JUNE 17TH IS
HOPE AIR
DAY**

Join us on June 17 to support equitable access to health care for all.

 **HOPE AIR**

Pledge your support at
hopeair.ca/bc

[Visit Hope Air](#)

[A Letter from our President](#)

Dear Readers,

[Subscribe](#)[Past Issues](#)[Translate](#) ▼

decisions they can make. I am very pleased to see opportunities for members to have input into health care. The UBC Centre for Rural Health Research and the BC Rural Health Network are hosting regional consultations to discuss the next steps in rural community engagement in healthcare decision-making as a follow-up to the [Gap Analysis](#). For more information or to get involved, please reach out to Phoebe (phoebe.lazier@bcrruralhealth.org).

Also, there is the opportunity to learn about the Community Health Centre model by attending a virtual town hall event on June 19th from 1:00-3:00. You can register for Accessing Team-Based Care through the CHC Model [here](#). The CHC model holds great opportunities for rural and remote areas and has the support of the government.

Sadly, I need to inform you that I have reluctantly accepted the resignation of Rhonda Elliott from the Board. We certainly enjoyed having her on the board and appreciated her contributions to our discussions. We wish her nothing but the best!

And I can't sign off without mentioning that Nurses Week was May 6-12. My background is in nursing and I have always been proud of my profession. I have always felt that nursing is a profession of opportunity. It is where you can find the area of nursing that speaks to your heart.

I have always, and always will, respect and appreciate the compassion and commitment nurses have, not only to all the people in their care but also to their commitment to making the healthcare system better.

Thanks to all of you!

Happy June!

Only my best,

Peggy

From the Desk of the Executive Director

Life is a Journey: Navigating Healthcare in Rural BC

Our theme this month, transportation to access care, is foundational to the wellness of rural residents in today's world. Usually, I dedicate this space to discussing the work I've done over the past 30 days, and as always, those days have been packed

[Subscribe](#)[Past Issues](#)[Translate](#) ▼

futures and the healthcare services they might inherit? What if they get hurt?

Then there's me. I've faced many medical challenges, primarily physical injuries until recently. Last year, I was diagnosed with early Parkinson's. The diagnosis required multiple tests, all necessitating travel out of town. I wasn't seen as a patient but as a series of diagnostic tests. Navigating the system as a procedure, not a person, was a painful ordeal. I was in chronic pain from a knee injury and Parkinson's, and appointments hours away were often in the middle of the night. Though I can self-navigate and streamline my process, it's exhausting and insulting to see how we treat people broadly in the healthcare system. What will I do when my mobility declines? What if I can't live here anymore?

I am incredibly lucky to have an amazing wife who can drive, my daughter, her husband, and grandkids here, one of my brothers, friends, and a supportive small-town community. Living close to other centers, an hour and a half of paved roads to a specialist, and having an ER and a family doctor are not things I take for granted. Many don't have these supports, live vast distances from care, and rely solely on the help of wonderful services like those we're highlighting this month. Many are also discriminated against due to their circumstances.

What if I lived in Fort Nelson or on Haida Gwaii? What if I were an Indigenous female in the north without anyone to support me? What if?

The amazing work being done by many in BC helps remove some of the "what ifs," but we need to do much more for those who have less due to their geographic location. I will fight for equitable access to care in BC for as long as I am able.

Together, as a province and rural community members, we must ensure that nobody is left behind. We have a lot of work to do collectively. What if we start on the edges and work our way in, perhaps creating a truly comprehensive health support system for all?

Yours in health and wellness,

Paul

[Subscribe](#)[Past Issues](#)[Translate](#) ▼

two to access specialized care in Kamloops or Kelowna. However, in relation to other areas in BC, this is considered a very short distance to access care. Not to mention, we do not have to rely on ferries or air transport to access larger centres, like many rural and remote communities do. For many of these communities where the next community is far away, an Emergency room closure can be catastrophic.

Challenging conditions:

What makes BC so beautiful also makes it challenging. Mountain passes and seasonal changes pose a massive challenge for rural residents travelling to access care whether that is driving over snowy passes with dangerous road conditions, or cancelled flights due to weather, travelling in rural BC for more than half the year has its complications. A northern resident who was grappling with a challenging cancer diagnosis once told me that they had weighed the risks, and it was a bigger threat to their life to drive over the Pine Pass in the winter every two weeks to receive chemotherapy, than it would be to delay receiving treatment until the spring, despite the risk of the cancer progressing. I know that they are not alone in having to make these very challenging decisions.

Lack of public transit and accessible ground transport:

Many rural communities do not have access to public transit both within their community and between them and other communities. This is a massive barrier for those who do not have access to a reliable vehicle or are unable to drive. I have had conversations with eighty-year-olds who hitchhike over 100 km weekly for medical appointments. This should not be the reality for anyone. Increased access to public transit is essential to equitable access to healthcare for rural residents.

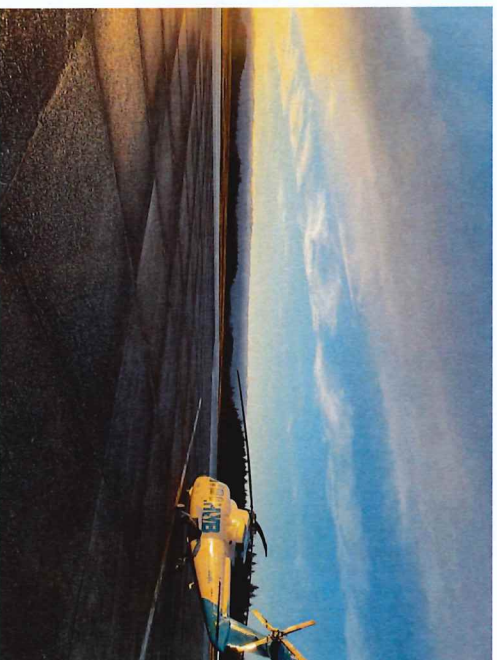
Although we face a lot of challenges in travel and transportation for rural residents, we must also consider all of the organizations and individuals who are working tirelessly to lessen these burdens. Organizations like Hope Air, Angel Flight, Helicopters Without Borders, volunteer driver programs and so many others are having a profound positive impact on equitable access to healthcare for rural residents. Please enjoy this edition of our newsletter, which is focused on the incredible services and programs that are available.

June Member of the Month:

[Subscribe](#)[Past Issues](#)[Translate](#) ▼

and dental therapists, mental health and addiction support workers, social workers, occupational therapists, dietitians, optometrists, audiologists, midwives, psychiatrists, clinical psychologists, Indigenous Knowledge Keepers and Elders, primary care physicians, and more. In addition, we are continually expanding our services to bring essential services into the communities that need them most.

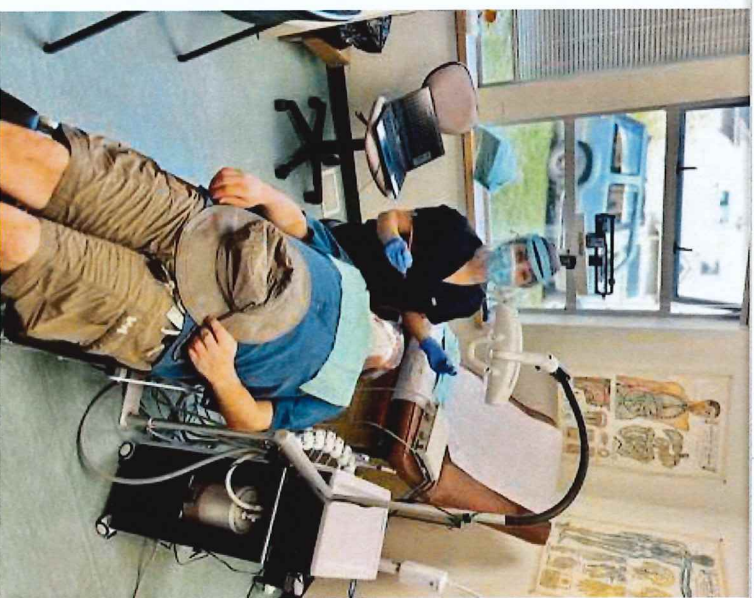
Since our inaugural flight in 2021, and in partnership with several Indigenous governments and health authorities we have facilitated over 5,600 health practitioner sessions, dozens of low-acuity patient transfers, the transport of 124,000 lbs of emergency, medical and food supplies, 3,500 vaccines, and have flown over 72,000 km in partnership with BC's most isolated Indigenous communities; a combined distance thirteen times the length of Canada – and all while being carbon neutral.



Our mission's significance is reflected in a recent program that took place on April 25th, 2024, when we airlifted a team of healthcare providers—family doctors, dentists, and diabetes nurses—to the remote community of Rivers Inlet (traditionally known as Wuikinuxv) by helicopter. Rivers Inlet, one of Western Canada's most isolated areas with no road access, relies solely on air transport or a challenging 4 to 8-hour boat journey through treacherous Rocky Mountain weather. Access to basic and comprehensive healthcare is scarce for this community.

[Subscribe](#)[Past Issues](#)[Translate](#) ▼

reliable dental care with a dental team that is paired with the community and is aware of the importance of consistency and continuity of care. In a three-day trip, our dental team is able to see upwards of 60 patients. That is 120 patient travel days saved and all the associated personal costs that typically incur.



The feedback we have received from the communities we work with has been nothing short of amazing. We have found that through consistent and reliable care people are taking ownership of their healthcare needs and requesting specialists, or providers.

We are here to respond to those needs and community direction and deliver comprehensive care to their doorsteps.

Helicopters Without Borders is an organization committed to growing the number of remote communities that have access to life-changing, preventative and acute care. We strive for a future where every British Columbian has access to the same standard of care, and we truly believe that our fly-in clinic model is a stepping stone to that future.

[See more members of the month here.](#)

[Subscribe](#)[Past Issues](#)[Translate](#) ▼

of critical medical care in the East Kootenay region of British Columbia. As a charity organization run by dedicated volunteers, we provide free, direct flights between Cranbrook and Kelowna for individuals requiring specialized treatment.

Since our establishment in 2019, Angel Flight East Kootenay has experienced remarkable growth. While we flew a total of 220 passengers using our single-engine aircraft between 2019-2021, we significantly expanded our services in 2022 with the acquisition of a larger, all-weather capable aircraft, the Cessna 414A. This upgrade allowed us to increase our capacity to better meet increasing needs, transporting 570 passengers in 2022 and 677 in 2023. Since January 2024, we have carried over 400 passengers, setting the stage for another record-breaking year.

As we proudly serve more people across our region, the increasing requests shed light on the challenges rural BC residents encounter in accessing critical medical care, reinforcing our dedication to meeting their evolving needs.

[Passenger Spotlight: Meet Jelena Jensen!](#)



Jennifer Jensen stands alongside volunteer pilot Ben Arons following her latest flight to Kelowna in May 2024.

At just 24 years old, Jelena Jensen knows firsthand the challenges of accessing medical care in BC. Since June 2023, she's relied on Angel Flight to attend her

[Subscribe](#)[Past Issues](#)[Translate ▾](#)

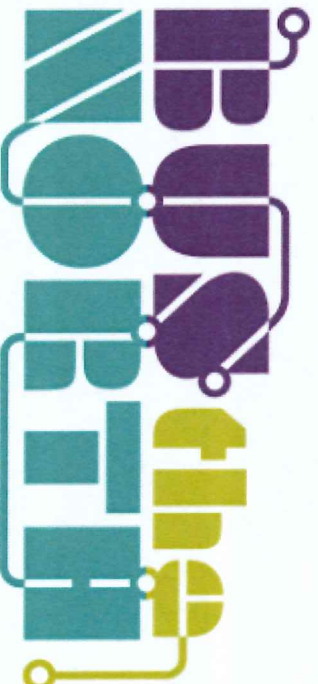
different transportation options that connect our communities to the people and places that matter. This connective network is made up of independent, region-wide buses and shuttles.

The goal? Increase the use of inter-community and rural transportation services across the north and help you get to where you need to go.

Whether it's a short trip or a long journey, there are a wide range of options to travel by bus throughout Northern BC: from Haida Gwaii to Prince George, from Fort St. John to Williams Lake, and the many communities in between.

Bus the North highlights all these options for you in one central place; connecting you to the people and places that matter.

[Visit the Bus the North Website for more Information](#)



Canadian Cancer Society's Cancer Travel and Accommodation Services (CTAAS-BC) Program

We know how difficult it is to face a cancer diagnosis and that it can be even harder for those who are worried about the financial impact or need to travel to receive their

Subscribe

Past Issues

Translate ▾



NEED A RIDE?

THE ISLAND HEALTH NON EMERGENCY TRAVEL PROGRAM CAN HELP

CALL [1-844-940-6617](tel:1-844-940-6617), EMAIL INFO.PATIENT.TRANSPORTATION@ISLANDHEALTH.CA OR

SCAN BELOW FOR MORE INFORMATION

Island Health's new transportation network supports people in many rural and remote regions. These contractors provide door-to-door, non-emergency patient transportation services, primarily facilitating trips to and from Island Health appointments, facilities, or locations.

Travel Assistance with Kindness and Compassion!

Hope Air is doing more than many know to help people reach medical treatment and appointments In BC and across Canada. Their “no patient left behind” policy is

[Subscribe](#)

[Past Issues](#)

[Translate](#) ▼



[Fire Officials Worry Wind Could Push Wildfire Into B.C. Town Today](#)



[B.C. Taking Action After UVic Student Dies Of Drug Poisoning, Ministry Says](#)



['Even the soil is catching fire' Dan Davies provides update on Parker Creek Wildfire](#)



[MAGIC OF MUSHROOMS: New Local Study Exploring Psilocybin Therapy For Major Depression](#)



[Northern Health Offering Big Incentives For RNs And LPNs To Move To Rural Communities](#)



[Overdoses In BC Harder To Treat With Rise Of Benzodiazepines In Toxic Drugs](#)

We look forward to connecting with you.

