
NEWS RELEASE

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GREEN LIGHT FOR CANCER CENTRE FOR THE NORTH

PRINCE GEORGE – The Province has formally approved funding for the Northern Cancer Control Strategy, which includes the construction of a new 4,200-square-metre cancer centre in Prince George.

The announcement was made by Prince George MLAs, on behalf of Health Services Minister George Abbott. The MLAs were joined by representatives of Northern Health and the BC Cancer Agency, an agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority.

“The BC Cancer Agency predicts that in the next 10 years, new cancer diagnoses in the region will rise by approximately 29 per cent,” said Prince George North MLA Pat Bell. “A new cancer centre in Prince George will allow us to provide residents of northern B.C. with increased access to cancer treatment and diagnostic services as close to their home communities as possible.”

Details of the strategy include:

- A 4,200-square-metre BC Cancer Agency’s Centre for the North, which will include two linear accelerators used in the delivery of radiation therapy treatment;
- A 1,000-square-metre addition and renovation to Prince George Regional Hospital to accommodate a new six-bed oncology unit, as well as an expansion of pathology, laboratory and diagnostic imaging services and the creation of additional office space to support the new BC Cancer Agency services;
- Enhancement to up to 11 Northern Health sites in communities outside of Prince George;
- The acquisition of new equipment and information technology at these sites to accommodate expansion of community cancer clinics; and
- The cancer centre will be designed to be energy efficient and achieve LEED gold certification.

“As a life-long resident of Prince George, I have heard countless stories about the challenge of battling cancer away from home and loved ones,” said Prince George-Mount Robson MLA Shirley Bond. “I have always said it was never a matter of if, but when we would have our own Northern Cancer Centre, and this funding ensures that will be the case.”

The construction of the BC Cancer Agency’s Centre for the North is one of the recommendations of Premier Gordon Campbell’s 2006 Consultation for Improved Cancer Care in Northern B.C. report. The report was the result of a broad consultation process, which involved visits to 17 northern B.C. communities and provided the opportunity for almost 1,000 people from across the North to provide input on access to cancer care in the region. Construction of the new facility is targeted to start in late 2009, with a completion goal of 2012, three years sooner than the report’s recommended completion date.

“Today’s announcement is an important step forward in providing improved cancer care and overall health-care services for Northern British Columbians,” said Prince George-Omineca MLA John Rustad. “Cancer can take a devastating emotional and physical toll on the lives of patients and their loved ones and having the appropriate services close at hand is wonderful news.”

The cost for the new centre, renovations to Prince George Regional Hospital, radiation and diagnostic equipment and infrastructure expansion for cancer care services throughout the North is an estimated \$99.5 million.

“Funding approval is an important next step in the creation of the BC Cancer Agency Cancer Centre for the North as part of a multi-faceted strategy to ensure northern British Columbians receive the best possible cancer care,” said Dr. Simon Sutcliffe, president of the BC Cancer Agency. “The strategy supports the Province’s vision for a cancer-free society and builds on our success in achieving some of the most favourable outcomes in North America.”

“The Northern Cancer Control Strategy and development of the new cancer centre reflect the partnership between the Provincial Health Services Authority, the BC Cancer Agency and Northern Health in working to ensure that residents of the North have access to a full range of cancer services and supports that are close to their home communities,” said Wynne Powell, Provincial Health Services Authority board chair. “That we are moving ahead with this project is long-awaited and exciting news for residents of the North.”

“The establishment of a regional cancer centre in Prince George is something that residents of this area have long supported,” said Dr. Charles Jago, Northern Health board chair and co-chair of the Premier Campbell’s Consultation for Improved Cancer Care in Northern B.C. “A regional cancer centre is an important part of our overall strategy to improve cancer services for patients in this region. Patients will see improved services including cancer prevention, health promotion, detection and diagnosis and home-based and palliative end of life care.”

The province’s four BC Cancer Agency regional centres are located in Surrey, Vancouver, Victoria and Kelowna. A fifth regional cancer centre is slated to open in Abbotsford in August 2008. The Centre for the North will be the BC Cancer Agency’s sixth regional centre and a critical component of the BC Cancer Agency’s provincial cancer control network.

The new cancer centre will be pursued as a public-private partnership. The next stage in the competitive selection process is to issue a request for qualifications (RFQ) to invite the private sector to participate in the process. Following the RFQ stage, a short-list of teams will be invited to submit proposals to design, build, finance and maintain the facility. The RFQ for the new cancer centre is expected to be issued by the end of July.

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