

## Guide: Federated Health Charities in the North

### Programs & Services Supporting Northern Ontario

All the charities supported by Federated Health Charities provide services across all of Ontario, including the Northern parts of the province. Ontarians in rural communities can experience unique circumstances and challenges in accessing care. That is especially true in the Northern parts of the province.

This guide highlights some of the programs and services available specifically to those in the Northern communities.

#### ALS Society of Canada:

ALS's Community Leads help to navigate healthcare systems and community supports, and provide information, resources, and education. They also:

- Offer virtual and in-person home visits to discuss individual and family needs;
- Facilitate virtual and in-person support groups for people living with ALS, their family members, and their caregivers;
- Facilitate virtual bereavement caregiver programs

ALS Canada helps clients cope with the daily mobility and communication challenges to help with retaining independence through the ALS Canada Equipment Program. ALS Canada works with allied health professionals to ensure that Northern clients have access to equipment, facilitating delivery and expenses to allow equal access to anyone affected by ALS.

#### Alzheimer Society:

First Link Care Navigators travel to meet with clients and connect clients to dementia-focused health services in Northern communities, such as:

- One-on-one or group support services
- Connection to local healthcare providers and community services
- Planning for future disease management

Weekly in-person groups for clients and their care partners are facilitated at varying locations within the community, including:

- Sudbury and Manitoulin Districts - North Shore Area, South to the French River, East to Warren, West to Massey,
- North Bay District, North to Tilden Lake, South to Burks Falls, East to Mattawa, West to Verner
- Thunder Bay
- Timmins-Porcupine District
- Sault Ste. Marie & Algoma District
- Kenora/Rainy River Districts (working with indigenous communities, introduced a new program: The Social, a respite program ) of both Sudbury and North Bay.
- A virtual option is available for all other locations.

### **Arthritis Society:**

For Northern communities, the Arthritis Society hosts many virtual programs (Arthritis Talks, Arthritis Line etc), offer grants and invite kids to attend the summer camp program.

Arthritis Rehabilitation and Education Programs (AREP) are offered in person and provide in home and clinic space for Occupational Therapy with a medical staff (OT) in Sudbury, Timmins and Thunder Bay.

Arthritis Society also offers community grants to partner organizations that can be accessed by those who want to provide an additional service in their area to help those suffering from arthritis.

### **Autism Ontario:**

Autism Ontario provides programs and services throughout Northern Ontario. Virtual programs are offered to reduce travelling barriers while in-person programs are also offered in a number of Northern locations, including:

- North Bay
- Sudbury
- Sault Ste. Marie
- Fort Frances
- Huntsville
- Barrie.

### **Canadian Cancer Society:**

Canadian Cancer Society recognizes the unique needs of the North and have launched a specific campaign to further support Northern communities.

The Cancer Information Helpline received 521 inquiries from 431 Northern Ontario residents looking for information and support related to cancer. 148 Cancer Information clients resided in a “remote” area of Northern Ontario.

Wheels of Hope provided 4,133 trips to 238 clients to help Northern Ontario residents get to their cancer treatment appointments.

The Travel Treatment Fund provided \$2,980 to five Northern Ontario clients to support their travel costs.

An estimated 50 requests for wigs and 10 requests for breast accessories were received from Northern Ontario residents.

### **Canadian Liver Foundation:**

Canadian Liver Foundation hosts a number of virtual resources to reach those in the furthest rural communities across Canada. These include:

- The Resource Hub with essential information on the 100+ forms of liver disease.
- A recipe bank of liver-friendly recipes.
- Monthly LIVERight Webinars with experts on a range of liver disease and liver health topics.
- Free forum for people living with liver disease, transplant recipients and their families to connect with each other, to learn about their disease and learn how to cope.

### **Crohn's & Colitis Canada:**

The Canadian Network of Virtual Access to Specialists for IBD (CaNVAS-IBD) is a national pilot program to provide virtual care for individuals living with IBD in rural and remote areas across Canada.

In 2016, Dr. Geoffrey Nguyen and his team at Sinai Health System launched a pilot test of an IBD telemedicine program in Ontario through the Ontario Telemedicine Network. The goal is to improve health outcomes for Canadians with IBD by connecting them with gastroenterologists at an IBD center of excellence.

Virtual care hubs in Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, Ontario, and Quebec aim to ensure patients have timely access to specialist care regardless of location. Each provincial virtual care hub is led by a gastroenterologist and IBD nurse to provide comprehensive IBD-related services.

Additionally, Dr. Neeraj Narula (McMaster University) and Drs. Brian Stotland and Emily Ching (IBD community clinicians) are leading the next phase of the MyGut™ and Provider Portal pilot. As Crohn's and Colitis Canada aims to expand the implementation of this app to community-based practices, we are piloting a 'hub-and-spoke' model in two Ontario community clinics, where recruited IBD patients using MyGut will be able to connect to an IBD nurse via the Provider Portal. The IBD nurse will provide patient navigation services and liaise with patients' IBD clinicians. This pilot aims to bridge gaps in healthcare access to make IBD care more accessible to individuals who might otherwise face geographical and/or logistical barriers to accessing care, as well as potentially reducing long-term healthcare costs by providing timely access to care via the Provider Portal. Remote monitoring may also lead to more personalized treatment plans, making it easier for patients to manage their condition effectively.

### **Cystic Fibrosis Canada:**

CF Canada is working to develop national standards of care that will provide a comprehensive source of knowledge on the main components of cystic fibrosis care in Canada and can be referenced as needed by any Canadian CF healthcare provider. These standards aim to enhance the quality of care provided at clinics across the country, including the clinic in Greater Sudbury. Furthermore, this program will ensure equitable access to a high standard of clinical care for people living with CF in remote areas.

Living with cystic fibrosis or supporting someone who lives with cystic fibrosis can be an isolating experience. Connection can have a positive impact on well-being and virtual programs provide a safe and supportive environment for the CF community - including in northern Ontario. Volunteers participate in programs like CF Canada's Peer Connect - a virtual peer-led conversation groups offer opportunities for connection by bringing community members with similar experiences together.

CF Canada is supported by volunteers, advocates, and supporters across Northern Ontario who organize events including the Walk to Make Cystic Fibrosis History in both Thunder Bay, Sudbury, and North Bay.

### **Diabetes Canada:**

Diabetes Canada is actively present in communities across Northern Ontario through a catalogue of virtual events and supports, allowing clients to receive diabetes education and support from the comfort of their home. These include:

- Virtual Diabetes Classes provide a platform to learn more about diabetes management through virtual diabetes education classes.
- Expert-led webinars on a variety of diabetes-related topics for individuals and caregivers.
- 1-800 BANTING (226-8464) Toll Free and Online Support: A specialized and virtual care telephone and email program delivering up-to-date diabetes resources and personalized service across the country.

### **Heart & Stroke:**

Fund life-saving research | Heart and Stroke Foundation Heart & Stroke funds breakthrough research across Canada, including in Northern Ontario. This includes the research project “Why 911 Ontario”, which examines why patients in the region have hesitated to call an ambulance in the event of a medical emergency, such as stroke.

Heart & Stroke has also partnered with the Northern Ontario School of Medicine to fund a renewable five-year Chair in Indigenous and Rural Health Research. Dr. Robert Ohle, who assumed the Chair role in October 2023, will advance research on cardio and cerebrovascular disease with Indigenous and rural communities and collaborate with Indigenous partners with an aim to build capacity in rural health across Ontario.

Digital peer supports are offered through two online peer communities which are private, closed, moderated and peer led. Our Community of Survivors is for people with lived experience of stroke or heart disease and the Care Supporters' Community is for caregivers. These groups connect people with lived experience with others who have had similar situations to share experiences, supports and learn from one another. These communities currently connect over 1,150 caregivers and 3,100 people with lived experience from across the country allowing for peer support regardless of geographic location.

### **Hemophilia Ontario:**

The Thunder Bay Family Camp program offers children in the province of Ontario with hemophilia and other inherited bleeding disorders a camping experience that meets their medical needs while fostering social interaction, facilitating personal growth and developing educational and recreational skills. The camp promotes fellowship, provides parental respite, and offers an opportunity for leadership.

Additionally, annual community days are held in Thunder Bay each year and the hemophilia clinic runs a clinic for members in the area twice per year to meet with the patients and connect them with Hemophilia services in the North.

### **Institute for Advancements in Mental Health:**

CBT-P training is offered for front line staff working with the Indigenous population in Sudbury.

Additionally, police training is provided in Thunder Bay and Owen Sound areas.

IAM's One on One Support Line is staffed by a team of mental health counselors who provide individualized supportive counseling, system navigation, and customized information and education to caregivers, individuals living with chronic mental illness, and our community.

While IAM does not have offices in Northern Ontario, the programs and services are accessible virtually online and over the phone to provide equal access to any client in any location.

### **The Kidney Foundation:**

The Kidney Foundation of Canada serves all of Northern Ontario with a focus on large regional programs based in Thunder Bay, North Bay, Sudbury, Timmins and Sault Ste. Marie. As part of the organization's strategic plan, Vision 2025: Together We Are Stronger, the Kidney Foundation is embarking on the development of a Northern Strategy to better meet the needs of patients and families in Northern Ontario.

An active outreach campaign also continues to build a roster of volunteers based in Northern Ontario to further our outreach efforts and increase local presence.

Summer camp (located in Dorset, Ontario) provides experiences for adults and youth affected by kidney disease or living with a transplant. Camp is the chance to have new adventures and make new friends in an environment that also provides essential medical services, including an on-site medical clinic and trained medical staff.

### **Lung Health Foundation:**

Respiratory diseases such as asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) are disproportionately prevalent in Northern Ontario, where geographic isolation, limited healthcare infrastructure, and long travel distances create major barriers to timely diagnosis and treatment.

Spirometry—the gold standard for diagnosing and managing these conditions—is rarely available in remote areas due to limited access to trained personnel and equipment. As a result, patients face delayed diagnoses, poor disease control, and increased hospitalization.

To address this gap, the Lung Health Foundation is launching a one-year Mobile Spirometry Clinic Pilot to bring lung function testing and education directly to underserved communities across Northern Ontario. Project Goals include:

- Improve access to high-quality spirometry testing in rural and remote communities.
- Support early detection of asthma and COPD to enable timely treatment.
- Empower patients and providers through on-site education and referral pathways.
- Generate data and insights to inform a scalable, sustainable model for respiratory diagnostics in underserved regions.

#### How It Works:

- A mobile clinic, staffed by a certified Respiratory Therapist (RT), will travel to communities on a rotating schedule.
- On-site spirometry testing will be performed in partnership with local healthcare providers.
- Patient education and referral pathways will be built to ensure continuity of care.
- Data collection and evaluation will monitor reach, quality, and clinical impact to guide future expansion.

Further, PCAP is an evidence-based education and management program to offer implementation support and enhancement to respiratory health programs across Ontario. The Lung Health Foundation has partnered with 12 primary care teams across Ontario, and supported over 100 other practices, to bring Asthma/COPD care to communities without access to major health centres. Sites include:

- Anishnawbe Mushkiki AHAC and the Meno Ya Win Health Centre in Sioux Lookout
- Sault Ste Marie PCAP site, serving 8 First Nations communities in the Algoma region
- Dryden and Marathon Family Health Teams in Northern Ontario, serving indigenous communities.

#### **MS Canada:**

From coast-to-coast, MS Canada currently has 72 peer support groups - of which 62 of these groups are regionally based (with 20 of those based in Ontario) and ten are



nationwide virtual support groups that individuals can join regardless of where they live.

Virtual wellness programs, such as TIME at Home, SPIRIT Club, and NeuroSask, provide targeted wellness programs for MS Canada clients across the country. Free nationwide education webinars are available for those interested, who can join MS live from the convenience of their home or office for in depth discussions with experts on a variety of topics related to MS.

We Talk MS which brings people living with MS together to share, grow and learn from each other's experiences and stories. Using private chat and public threads, the digital platform supports discussions to help people work through difficult conversations and strengthen bonds with family and friends.

### **Ontario AIDS Network:**

The AIDS Network includes four agencies that specifically serve communities in Northern Ontario that work to identify training and capacity building needs, resources/information sharing opportunities, and advocate for increased funding for services in their region.

### **Ontario Federation for Cerebral Palsy:**

The Ontario Federation for Cerebral Palsy (OFCP) supports members with cerebral palsy across the entire province, including northern Ontario. Services are available remotely and through direct outreach to ensure equitable access regardless of location. Supports are provided through the Assistive Devices Funding Program (ADFP), Life Enrichment Activity Funding (LEAF), system navigation and referrals, and Augmentative and Alternative Communication assistance, among other programs.

OFCP partners with organizations such as Partners for Planning, which has established family networks across the province, including northern Ontario to help provide supports to families and members in remote communities.

The organization is deeply conscientious about inclusive engagement with both Indigenous and Francophone communities across Ontario. This guides outreach and ensures that programs and supports are responsive, culturally aware, linguistically accessible, and inclusive for individuals and families living with cerebral palsy in northern and remote areas.

### **Osteoporosis Canada:**

Osteoporosis Canada offers programs, support services and educational forums throughout Ontario including Northern Ontario. Virtual programs including Bone Health 101, Living Well (6-week series) and support groups provide engagement and education to individuals in other northern communities. These offer information about risk reduction and how to better manage living well with the disease. Participants receive current, accurate information on a variety of topics, discussions and experience sharing and have professional guest speakers.

Support Groups offer a chance for those with Osteoporosis to learn from each other and provide support. Support groups are safe spaces for people with shared experiences offering the opportunity to learn from one another, discuss self-management, talk freely with peers, exchange ideas while offering each other the support only someone in a similar situation can provide.

Osteoporosis Canada is also working to recruit local volunteers who can be trained and act as a resource in Northern Ontario to provide in-person programming and support.

### **Parkinson Canada:**

Parkinson Canada offers virtual webinars and resources to people living with Parkinson's and their care partners across the country. And, the Spinning Wheels Tour, a cross-Canada bike ride, where people living with Parkinson's create connections and provide support to those in remote and rural communities.

CareFinder is an innovative, user-friendly online directory designed to connect one with Parkinson's-informed services based on someone's location. Simply some information and access a community of support, from movement disorder specialists to essential wellness programs. This wonderful tool directs you towards tailored services, programs, and supports, in your community.

Support Groups and Additional Programs offer an extensive network of support groups, providing safe spaces for individuals to share experiences and cope with the daily challenges of Parkinson's. Additionally, various programs, including exercise classes and educational opportunities, offer holistic support to individuals and their families.

Recruitment is underway to allow in person support groups in Sudbury, Thunder Bay, and other northern Ontario communities. Virtual groups are also available in English and French.

### **Sickle Cell Awareness Group of Ontario:**

Healthcare professionals in Northern Ontario are encouraged to learn more about SCD via the E-course for healthcare professionals and annual summit. Patients and families from this region can access SCAGO's programs virtually, such as:

- Peer support program
- Counselling
- Emergency grants support

Recruitment is underway for a chapter lead and some additional volunteers for the Northern Region.

### **Spinal Cord Injury Ontario:**

Spinal Cord Injury Ontario programs and services include peer support, family peer support, service navigation, employment services, equipment, education, and advocacy. Local staff in regional offices in Thunder Bay, Sault Ste. Marie and Sudbury

serve the north with an understanding of the unique challenges faced by people with disabilities in northern and remote areas of the province.

The Thunder Bay Region location supports people with spinal cord injury and family members living in the areas of Northern Ontario with a primary focus on Northwestern Ontario (including districts of Thunder Bay, Sioux Lookout, Dryden, Fort Frances, Atikokan, Kenora, Marathon, Greenstone, Red Lake and several dozen First Nations Communities) with these direct services.

The Sault Ste. Marie Region location supports people with spinal cord injury and family members living in the areas from Elliot Lake to the East, to Marathon on the West, to Hearst on the North and all the places between with these direct services.

The Sudbury Region location supports people with spinal cord injury and family members living in the areas of Northeastern Ontario (including Timmins and Cochrane area to the north) with these direct services.

In addition to the help, established connections, and resources local staff bring, as internet access improves, SCIO is increasingly able to help people with additional supports online, including Peer Support educational webinars and access to trustworthy knowledge and best practices.