Clinical abortion services return to Fredericton

By TRACY GLYNN

Fredericton - Clinical abortion services are returning to Fredericton. Clinic 554 announced its opening on Jan. 16, 2015, as a family practice providing integrated abortion care services as well as specialized care for the LGBTQ community. Clinic 554 is located at the former Morgentaler Clinic.

“The New Brunswick is more diverse than people think. There are a lot of people here with unique health needs but we’re too strapped for cash. The Province is doing a lot—building Community Health Centres, bringing in allied providers like NPs and Midwives. We just wanted to do our part to contribute—to make sure all New Brunswickers have access to the same quality and range of healthcare services that other provinces have,” said Dr. Adrian Eoin Edgar, Clinic 554’s Medical Director in a prepared statement.

Clinic 554 will take on 600 patients who are currently awaiting a family doctor in Fredericton and will provide healthcare to many underserved communities, including transgender children, youth and adults, people newly infected with HIV, STIs or Hepatitis C, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, two-spirit, and queer patients.

Besides offering abortion services, Clinic 554 will also offer an array of reproductive health services, including contraception, cancer screening and pregnancy options, such as emergency IUDs and prenatal care. The reopening of the clinic was made possible in part by the fundraising efforts of Reproductive Justice NB and the Fredericton Youth Feminists.

The groups launched the #SaveTheClinic fundraising campaign in the wake of the closure of the Morgentaler abortion clinic in Fredericton. The clinic closed in July 2014 following a 20 year battle with the New Brunswick government to have its abortion services funded for its patients. New Brunswick is the only province in Canada with clinical abortion services that are not funded by Medicare.

The #SaveTheClinic campaign succeeded in raising more than $125,000 for improved abortion access in New Brunswick. More than 1,500 people and organizations donated.

“It was touching to receive donations in every amount. Many who only had $5 to spare still took the time to send it along in order to help the people of New Brunswick access safe abortion services in a clinic setting,” says Allison Webster, treasurer of Reproductive Justice NB.

Reproductive justice activists demand public-funded abortions in clinics.

While abortion access activists are celebrating, they are also demanding that abortion services offered at Clinic 554 be covered by Medicare and that other barriers to abortion access be removed.

“The New Brunswick government continues to violate the Canada Health Act and put people’s lives at risk,” says Jessi Taylor from Reproductive Justice NB and a writer and editor with the NB Media Co-op.


reproductive health services. They plan to meet Health Minister Victor Boudreau this month to discuss the public funding of reproductive health services throughout the province.

Newly elected Liberal Premier Brian Gallant announced the removal of a restriction to abortion access found in the Medical Services Payment Act last November. The change meant that those wanting access to abortion services no longer had to obtain the approval of two doctors certifying the procedure as “medically necessary.”

Conservative Opposition Leader Bruce Fitz attempted to force a vote on the changes to abortion access in the Legislature in December but was denied when the Liberal party stood united in their support for the changes.

Morgentaler opened his first abortion clinic in Montreal in 1969, when attempting to perform an abortion was a crime punishable by life in prison and the person seeking an abortion faced a two year prison sentence. Abortion became legal in Canada following the 1988 Supreme Court of Canada decision in R. v. Morgentaler.

An amendment to New Brunswick’s Medical Services Payment Act brought in 1994 attempted to restrict abortion access. Then Liberal Premier Frank McKenna vowed to stop Dr. Henry Morgentaler from setting up an abortion clinic in Fredericton. “If Mr. Morgentaler tries to open a clinic in the province of New Brunswick, he’s going to get the fight of his life,” said McKenna. McKenna’s amendments restricted abortion access, but did not stop Morgentaler from operating the only private abortion clinic in the Maritimes in Fredericton for 20 years.

Dr. Morgentaler launched a lawsuit against the New Brunswick government in 2002 in an attempt to get the government to pay for abortions at his clinic. The lawsuit, which did not go anywhere following his death in May 2013, cost Morgentaler more than $1 million. Attempts to find out how much the governments of New Brunswick have paid on lawsuits fighting abortion access have been denied. The Morgentaler Clinic in Fredericton was performing about 600 abortions or 60 per cent of the procedures every year in the province at the time of its closure. Currently, only two hospitals in New Brunswick, the Moncton Dr. Georges-L.-Dumont University Hospital Centre and the Baturst Chaleur Regional Hospital, are performing abortions.

Tracy Glynn is a member of Reproductive Justice NB and a writer and editor with the NB Media Co-op.

In Brief

Fredericton high schools, suspended for protesting their school’s dress code policy, had their bans from prom, graduation ceremonies and extra-curricular activities lifted. Fredericton High School’s reprimand of the students was denounced by parents, legal experts and the public.

According to Clean Energy Canada’s report, Tracking the Energy Revolution, 23,700 Canadians are now working in clean energy sector compared to the 22,340 directly employed by the tar sands.

US Iraq war resisters have been notified that decisions are imminent in their cases. One resister has received a deportation date. For more information on how to support war resisters, visit the War Resisters Support Campaign at resisters.ca.

The Canadian Union of Postal Workers and organizations supporting seniors and persons with disabilities have launched a legal challenge against Canada Post’s attempt to end door-to-door mail delivery. The challenge argues that only the Canadian Parliament, not Canada Post’s management, can make the decision to end home delivery postal service. For more information, visit: culp.ca.

Canadian beekeepers have launched a $400 million class action to recover damages from the widespread use of neonicotinoid pesticides, specifically those made by Bayer and Syngenta. The action seeks damages for the impact on the bee population, including dead colonies, contaminated hives and decreased honey production.

“Save door-to-door” lawn signs are springing up on lawns across Canada. Photo by Jonah O’Neill.

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Housing crisis in New Brunswick as thousands wait and federal funds expire

By SHAWN MARTIN and MATT MOSHER

Fredericton – Over 6,000 New Brunswickers are on a waiting list for affordable housing while the province is likely to face more challenges meeting housing needs with the expiration of federal funding subsidies. New Brunswick currently provides 14,000 units of affordable housing, nowhere near close to the demand, which has been assessed to be 30,000. New Brunswickers in need of core housing, according to Tim Ross, Executive Director of the New Brunswick Non-Profit Housing Association.

“...there is much more demand for affordable housing than what we can supply. There is a supply issue in New Brunswick and, indeed, across Canada,” explains Ross.

Nikita Hartt is a single parent and university student living in social housing in Fredericton. She says she was fortunate to get into a place because she met a number of criteria but that’s not the case for everyone. “I have friends, single moms, who were in some pretty rough positions that were worse than mine, and they had to wait up to three years for housing,” says Hartt.

Maintaining and expanding access to affordable housing has become an increasingly pressing issue throughout New Brunswick, with a government committed to reducing to spending, and the impending expiry of federal funding agreements that have supported affordable housing in the province and throughout Canada for about 40 years.

The expiry of social housing operating agreements is the expiry of federal housing subsidies to non-profit, public, and co-operative housing providers here in New Brunswick – affecting just over 10,000 units.

Of the 10,000 affordable housing units affected by the expiry of federal operating agreement subsidies, approximately two-thirds – or between 6,000-7,000 of these units – are expected to face “viability issues” in meeting their mandate of providing affordable housing to those in need.

According to Ross, housing providers facing financial viability issues will have three options: “increase rents, defer maintenance or sell buildings.”

The expiry of federal social housing operating agreements, in terms of the expiry of the [federal] Operating Agreements, How can we be innovative and creative to create more housing?” explained Sue Calhoun, Community Development Officer for the Greater Moncton Homelessness Steering Committee, which helped co-sponsor the meeting with the CMHC.

Some existing examples of creative and innovative affordable housing initiatives include: the City of Moncton providing free land to the YWCA to build transitional housing for pregnant teens and young adults; partnerships between non-profits and the private sector; and, rent-reduction arrangements with private landlords in exchange for acquiring tenants, thus helping reduce Moncton’s double-digit rental housing vacancy rates.

Presently, New Brunswick’s total affordable housing stock totals approximately 14,000 units that are operated by public, non-profit, co-operative, and private sectors.

According to the CMHC, housing is deemed “affordable” when costs do not exceed 30% of before-tax income. In 2011, the Statistics Canada found over 29,565 New Brunswickers to be in “core housing need,” according to any of the following criteria: “accessibility needs,” “low income, reduced affordability,” (based on the 30% income threshold), or “suitability” (based on housing size and capacity).

Calhoun also spoke to the impacts of financial viability issues on affordable housing providers: “They won’t have a mortgage anymore,” she stated, referring to operating agreements as a capital investment, “but they’ll still have that big gap of the two thirds of rent that the federal government was paying. It’s a real disaster waiting to happen.”

Compounding these challenges is not only the age of New Brunswick’s total housing stock, but also the province’s aging population. Ross described this dilemma: “New Brunswick’s housing stock is a lot older than, for example, Saskatchewan, or other provinces. We have a lot of aging housing stock...maybe with a senior, citizen paying exorbitant heating costs. Maybe there are accessibility challenges.”

The recently renewed Federal-Provincial Investment in Affordable Housing Funding Agreement, with costs shared between two levels of government, does provide a lifeline to New Brunswick’s affordable housing stock to the tune of 78 million dollars over 5 years.

Social Development Minister Cathy Rogers and her office were unavailable for comment. Nevertheless, both Ross and Calhoun commended the 5 year renewal of the Federal-Provincial funding agreement on affordable housing, noting improvements following after the expiry of New Brunswick, Kevin Price, Executive Assistant to Fredericton-Oromocto Conservative MP Natan Obed, and the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) Halifax Regional Federal-Provincial funding agreement on affordable housing.

While Price also pointed out that under “Canada’s Economic Action Plan 2013” the federal government will invest nationally 1.25 billion dollars over 5 years into affordable housing, he would not comment on whether or not federal operating agreements would be renewed or on one way or the other, I don’t know that all I know is that the province is still finishing up agreements with the federal government.”

Ross emphasizes the cumulative funding losses in New Brunswick alone associated with the expiry of federal social housing operating agreements, which he states would total a cumulative loss of over 675 million dollars in operating subsidies to New Brunswick’s affordable housing portfolio.

At the present time, New Brunswickers such as Calhoun and others present at the November 26 meeting are left to seek out alternative means of responding to the challenges associated with federal operating agreements continue to expire.

Shawn Martin and Matt Mosher are recent social work graduates from St. Thomas University. They were NB Media Co-op interns in the fall of 2014.