

Conseil de santé de Clare Community Health Board
Yarmouth Regional Hospital
60 Vancouver St.,
Yarmouth, NS
B5A 2P5
November 6, 2020

Ronnie LeBlanc, Warden/préfet
Municipality of the District of Clare/Municipalité de Clare
1185, Route 1
Little Brook, NS
B0W 1M0



CONSEIL DE SANTÉ
DE CLARE
CLARE
Community Health Board



Dear Warden LeBlanc,

COVID-19 has made all of us keenly aware of the importance of internet availability and affordability for all residents of Nova Scotia. Le Conseil de santé de Clare Community Health Board is committed to supporting our communities. Inequitable internet access is a population health issue, as it creates inequities for work and educational opportunities, increases social isolation, and poses barriers to community services and health care.

“Sense of belonging” is measured by the Nova Scotia Health Profile 2015 because having community connections impacts health, and by extension health costs. We know from this same document that sense of belonging is strong in Nova Scotia compared with the rest of Canada. Yet this strength of our province is severely impacted by the social isolation which is not only pronounced during the pandemic, but often ongoing for rural people and people with mobility issues. Internet access is crucial for Nova Scotia residents to stay connected with their communities and with needed services, particularly so in rural areas.

Small business, self-employed people, and the increasing numbers of people who work from home for reasons both pandemic-related and not all depend upon reliable high-speed internet to function. Meeting their needs carries enormous potential economic benefit for Nova Scotia, including the ability to attract vibrant populations and accompanying strong tax bases. Conversely, we see the lack of internet services contributing to job loss and population loss in underserved areas. The time to turn the tide is now.

We are cognizant of the initiatives to extend high speed internet that are taking place in rural areas throughout the province. While rural residents wait for access, however, we see several ways in which the municipality can support the needs of community members. These steps address the urgent needs of residents during regular times as well as the heightened needs demonstrated by COVID-19 restrictions. They include:

- The timely establishment of community wifi access points (such as fire halls and community centres) that can serve all residents without high-speed internet and can continue to serve low-income residents after the establishment of service
- Ensuring that you are taking full advantage of programs such as Universal Broadband Fund and CRTC Broadband Fund;
- The development and publicization of detailed plans for internet parity with timelines, including measures to ensure affordability of both internet access and devices for low-income residents

We appreciate your focus on this essential service and meeting the needs of all Canadians. In conclusion, we ask that you include the Community Health Boards in any consultation processes and work with us to identify opportunities for mutual support to best serve our communities and create equality for services and opportunities for all residents of _____.

Sincerely yours,

Shawna LeBlanc & Erin Amirault
Co-Chairs

Via email