

# Community Connection



## Pembroke Regional Hospital Spring 2026 Edition

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### Health Minister Approves Amalgamation With Phoenix Centre For Children & Families



**Susan Kennedy**

The Phoenix Centre for Children and Families and the Pembroke Regional Hospital are excited to share that Minister of Health, Sylvia Jones has approved amalgamation of the health care partners, marking a significant milestone in the region's commitment to delivering comprehensive, seamless, and high-quality mental health care for children, youth, and families.

Effective April 1st, the Phoenix Centre will become part of Mental Health Services of Renfrew County, and become known as "The Phoenix Centre for Children and Families of Pembroke Regional Hospital". More importantly, all services will continue to be delivered in their current locations, with no changes to contact numbers, registration processes, or documentation systems in order to ensure a seamless and smooth transition for both clients and staff.

"We believe this is the best path forward for our staff and the families we serve," said Susan Kennedy, Executive Director of the Phoenix Centre. "This amalgamation will allow us to

maintain our high standards of care while ensuring our team is supported and valued. It's about delivering better care in a better way - especially for youth transitioning into adult services and for families navigating multiple systems of support."

The Phoenix Centre has long been a cornerstone of child and youth mental health services in Renfrew County, supporting individuals aged 17 and under who are experiencing emotional and behavioural challenges. This amalgamation is designed to preserve and enhance these services while aligning them with PRH's broader mental health programming.

"This is an exciting opportunity to build a stronger, more unified system of care," said Sabine Mersmann, PRH President and CEO. "By bringing together the expertise and dedication of both organizations, we can ensure that families receive the support they need at every stage of life, while also better supporting our health care workers with competitive compensation and benefits."

Mrs. Mersmann added that it took a great deal of foresight and courage on behalf of the Phoenix Centre's Board and Administration to seek out innovative alternatives that could offer a secure



**Sabine Mersmann**

future for the Phoenix Centre, its services and its team.

This foresight was echoed by Minister Jones in her approval letter to the organizations, congratulating them on achieving this significant milestone, thanking them for their leadership and for "continuing your commitment to advancing Ontario's vision for integrated patient care."

Mrs. Mersmann and Ms. Kennedy expressed their gratitude to Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke MPP Billy Denault who has been very helpful and supportive throughout the process as well as to the Ministry of Health and all of their stakeholders for supporting this vision.

To ensure that the amalgamation timelines could be met if approved, a lot of work has already taken place involving the hospital's Human Resources, Finance, and Information Technology teams along with CUPE (Canadian Union of Public Employees). This work will now continue and both organization Boards will also have some work to complete over the next few weeks.

### Pembroke Regional Hospital Recognized For Using Blood Wisely

Pembroke Regional Hospital is celebrating a meaningful milestone after being officially recognized as a Using Blood Wisely Hospital, a national designation awarded by Choosing Wisely Canada in partnership with Canadian Blood Services.



The Using Blood Wisely Hospital designation shows that our hospital is committed to using blood responsibly and making sure that our patients only receive blood transfusions when they truly need them. In achieving this designation, PRH is now part of a select group of 190 hospitals that is making a difference for patients, donors and Canada's blood supply.

"We are incredibly proud of our teams for earning this

national recognition," said Beth Brownlee, Vice-President of Clinical Services and Chief Nursing Executive. "Choosing blood wisely means making careful, clinically driven decisions about when blood is truly needed. This principle ensures that patients receive the right care at the right time, while respecting blood as a precious and limited resource made possible by donors in our community, so it is available for those who need it most."

To receive the designation, hospitals must not only meet or exceed national benchmarks, but also maintain those standards which include:

- Giving one unit of blood at a time whenever possible, then reassessing the patient before deciding if more is needed. This careful, step-by-step approach is used in at least 65% of transfusions.
- In 80% of cases, stable patients are safely managed without a transfusion because their blood levels are above the recommended transfusion threshold.

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### New & Noteworthy From PRH President & CEO



**Sabine Mersmann**

Since my last update, we've welcomed in a new year and, as evident in this edition of Community Connection, there has been a lot of activity taking place at PRH. I'm pleased to share a few updates that haven't been highlighted yet, starting with construction.

#### Tower A – Infrastructure Repairs

In early December we experienced the failure of decades old piping under the first floor of Tower A. Following a thorough assessment, it was determined that the aging pipes required replacement, but once the floors were opened up, the true extent of the damage to the entire pipeline in that area was revealed.

The construction project necessitated excavation in our Chapel, the Administration corridor, part of the Tower A rotunda and the doctors' charting room, essentially blocking off the better part of two wings on Tower A's first floor.

As a temporary measure, an area for prayer, meditation and reflection was created on the 2nd floor of Tower A near the cafeteria in room A211. **Continued on Page 2**

### County Of Renfrew Marks Official Opening Of The Renfrew County Mesa HART Hub

The County of Renfrew has announced the official opening of the Renfrew County Mesa HART Hub, a new service that expands access to high quality mental health, addictions, and housing supports for residents experiencing homelessness, mental health challenges, or substance use concerns.

In January 2025, the Province of Ontario selected the partnership of the County of Renfrew and Pembroke Regional Hospital to host a Homelessness and Addiction Recovery Treatment (HART) Hub in collaboration with local community organizations. The Hub is built

on the Mesa model – a collaborative, multi sector approach to providing coordinated, compassionate care.

On February 5th, a ribbon cutting ceremony was held at the Carefor Mackay Centre in the City of Pembroke, the current location for the Bridge Housing portion of the Renfrew County Mesa HART Hub. Local elected officials and staff were joined by Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke MPP Billy Denault and MPP John Jordan, Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Health.

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## PRH Recognized For Using Blood Wisely ...Continued From Front

These practices ensure that patients receive only what they need while helping preserve blood for emergencies and for those facing critical illness.

Dr. Kathy Reducka, Chair of the hospital's Medical Quality Improvement Committee, shared that the initiative was launched through this committee under the leadership of Dr. Amanda Williamson and has since become a shared source of pride across the organization. "Our teams have truly embraced evidence-based transfusion practices, and this designation is a testament to their dedication," she said, adding that the hospital's success is grounded in both collaboration and a strong culture of quality improvement.

A key part of that collaboration has been PRH's ongoing partnership with the Eastern Ontario Regional Laboratory Association (EORLA). Their expertise and support have strengthened PRH's ability to meet national benchmarks and maintain safe, responsible transfusion practices.

"We are extremely proud to support PRH in achieving this designation," said Al Lupish, Laboratory Operations Manager for Pembroke and Deep River Hospitals. "Our partnership is built on shared goals - improving patient safety, stewarding resources responsibly, and ensuring high-quality Laboratory and Transfusion Medicine services."

## New & Noteworthy...Continued From Front

While most of this work was completed in late January, additional piping issues were discovered under the floor in Medical Records, some housekeeping areas in an adjoining corridor and parts of our Lab space.

Phase 1 of this work took place in early March and Phase 2 which includes half of the hallway by our hospital's lower loading dock began the week of March 9th.

Despite the noise and disruption, we are thankful that this work hasn't directly impacted any of our patient care areas.

We anticipate having the Chapel re-opened by the end of March.

### Tower C - Main Entrance and New Auxiliary Gift Shop

Unanticipated work also took place in the new Tower C entrance space after water damage from a previous flood was discovered. Thankfully, Mulvihill Drug Mart was not affected, but it did cause delays. We now hope to see the wrap up of that work by the end of March.

And much to the delight of our Auxiliary, their new Gift Shop is very close to completion. In fact, the contractor has shared with us that they should have occupancy and be able to start their setup also by the end of this month.

### Delirium Flag Shines A Light On Our Work To Support Safer Care



Members of our Medical team (top) and Intensive Care Unit team (bottom) hoist the flag.

Recently, we had the opportunity to host the Delirium Flag, part of a globally recognized awareness initiative that supports early identification and safer care for patients at risk of, or experiencing, delirium.

Delirium, which is often caused by multiple factors, including infection, medications, and disrupted sleep-

wake cycles is associated with a higher risk of complications and longer hospital stays, which is why early recognition and intervention matter so much.

Important work is happening at PRH, under the leadership of Dr. Declan Rowan (Chief of Staff), to improve the early identification and management of delirium across our hospital, including a successful staff education campaign.

Since the launch of this work, more than 80% of patients identified with delirium have had effective interventions put in place.

### Mobile Maternity Services

I'm also excited to share that we've received provincial funding for the development of a Prenatal, Perinatal, and Postnatal Mobile Clinic. This innovative new program will help address the unique health care needs of families in the far reaching corners of Renfrew County when it comes to essential maternal and newborn care.

Consisting of a dedicated team of midwives or nurse practitioners and registered nurses, the community-based clinic will offer a variety of services including prenatal check-ups, perinatal monitoring, and post-natal support with a strong emphasis on health education for patients and families.

### Planning for Epic Go-Live

And lastly, the countdown is on as we are just seven months away from being part of the largest single Canadian install of Epic, our new health information system that will feature the MyChart patient portal. Epic will not only provide our patients with access to their own health information, but it will enable us to have a single digital record across all partner hospitals - reducing duplication, supporting seamless care, and giving our patients a more connected experience.

To achieve this, a lot of work has already taken place over the past year. Over 200 staff and physicians have contributed to 22 different working groups, shaping the PRH build of the system and we're now making plans to train approximately 900 staff and physicians so that they are ready at go-live this fall.

There will be a lot more public communication around the launch of MyChart around September so stay tuned!

## HART Hub Opens...Continued From Front



"As a county-wide provider of mental health services, and a leading partner in this initiative, we couldn't be more proud of the work that has already been done to address the needs of those in the vulnerable sectors of our communities," said Pembroke Regional Hospital President and CEO Sabine Mersmann.

"Now, more than ever, there is great value in being able to draw on collective expertise by working closely with others. Ontario's investment in this work is reflective of this principle and we are very pleased to be part of this and the outcomes that will be achieved."

Unique to rural Ontario, the Renfrew County Mesa HART Hub integrates the "hub and spoke" model, allowing clients to move seamlessly between the 24/7 Intake Centre and existing community based access points. A three year, \$6.3 million investment from the Ontario Government supports this coordinated system, ensuring residents can receive assistance close to home.

Additional components include Bridge Housing units and supportive treatment beds. The HART Hub has partnered with more than 17 local agencies, as well as first responders, local municipalities, and individuals with lived or living experience.

Renfrew County Warden Jennifer Murphy said the Hub reflects the County's strength in developing rural, community driven solutions. "The opening of this HART Hub represents a shift in how we respond to complex needs in our community: from fragmented supports to a coordinated system of care. Through strong partnerships across health, social services, and community agencies, Renfrew County is building a model rooted in compassion, accountability, and results," she said.

"The HART Hub brings together the right partners, in the right place, to connect people with support when it matters most. This is a community led solution, made possible through the Mesa initiative, collaboration, and an unwavering belief that everyone deserves the chance to be well."

Since October 2025, Carefor's Bridge Housing program has offered short term stays to help individuals transition from homelessness to permanent housing. To date, 12 clients have accessed the 12 beds available on site.

## Pembroke Regional Hospital Launches Nurse-Led Critical Care Response Program

Pembroke Regional Hospital has introduced an important new initiative designed to ensure that patients who are being cared for in one of their inpatient units receive specialized care through a rapid response program when early signs of clinical deterioration in their condition begin to appear.

The new Rapid Assessment of Critical Events (RACE) team consists of ICU-trained nurses who assess and intervene early, helping prevent medical emergencies, reduce complications, and, in many cases, avoid the need for Intensive Care Unit (ICU) admission.

Supported by more than half a million dollars in new Ministry of Health funding, this program represents a significant advancement in the hospital's efforts to strengthen early intervention and enhance the quality of care.



RACE team members, from left: Carissa Fletcher, Christa Duff, Sharleen Doucette and Catrina Zadow.

The RACE team is currently in its pilot phase, staffed by two Clinical Care Leads who provide coverage from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. seven days a week. In June, the program will ramp up to 24/7 coverage.

At the heart of the RACE program is a commitment to delivering the right care to the right patient at the right time. Specially trained ICU

Critical Care Registered Nurses carry a dedicated phone and respond whenever frontline staff identify concerning changes in a patient's health, such as sudden shifts in blood pressure, breathing difficulties, or medication-related issues.

These nurses work closely with Respiratory Therapists, Physicians, and specialists known as Intensivists who manage critically ill patients, using approved medical directives to deliver rapid, evidence-based care wherever it is needed in the hospital. The team also checks in on patients during the first 48 hours after they leave the ICU to be admitted to an inpatient unit - an especially vulnerable period - to ensure recovery is progressing safely.

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## New Clinical Skill Significantly Enhances Care For Hospital's Most Critical Patients

The Intensive Care Unit (ICU) at Pembroke Regional Hospital is celebrating an important milestone with the recent introduction of a new clinical skill that significantly enhances care for the region's most critically ill patients.

The ICU team is now fully trained and equipped to perform proning - a highly specialized therapeutic technique used for patients experiencing Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome (ARDS) or severe respiratory failure.

Proning involves carefully positioning a deeply sedated, mechanically ventilated patient face-down for extended periods, typically 16 hours at a time over several days. This positioning helps to expand lung regions, reduce pressure on the lungs, and enhance oxygen delivery, making it a vital intervention in critical care.

The technique is a complex and delicate intervention that requires a coordinated multi-disciplinary team, detailed planning, and constant vigilance to ensure patient safety.

This includes a team of six people, the number required to prone and de-prone and a team of three to reposition the patient's head and arms every two hours while prone.

Until now, any patient requiring proning would have had to be transferred to Ottawa to receive

this level of care. However, thanks to extensive training and support from nursing, our intensivists, health care aides, our education team, respiratory therapy, allied health, pharmacy, food services, and the broader critical care team, patients can now receive this advanced treatment right here at home.



**Dr. Natalie Needham-Nethercott**

ICU Lead Physician, Dr. Natalie Needham-Nethercott says the benefits of offering proning locally cannot be overstated. "Proning is an evidence-based intervention that can be lifesaving for patients with severe respiratory failure. However, its survival benefits are greatest if adopted early in patients with severe acute respiratory distress syndrome. Having this capability within our own ICU means that we can intervene quickly and avoid unnecessary delays. This practice change reaffirms our team's commitment to provide exceptional care that adheres to best practice and evidence-based medicine."

The team completed their first patient proning on February 5th, marking a major advancement in the hospital's critical care program. Staff

described the moment as both rewarding and deeply meaningful - an example of teamwork and expertise coming together to elevate the standard of care for the region's most vulnerable patients.

Hospital President and CEO Sabine Mersmann says this achievement reflects the organization's ongoing commitment to expanding high-quality care for the community.

"Introducing proning in our ICU is a significant step forward for our hospital and for the patients we serve. It means families can remain close to home during some of the most difficult moments of their lives, and it reflects the skill, dedication, and innovation of our entire critical care team. We are incredibly proud of the work that has brought this important capability to our hospital."



**Prior to going live with the new skill, some of the team demonstrated the technique for members of the Senior Leadership Team.**

## RACE Team...Continued From Page 2

"This is an important step forward for patient safety and for the support of our staff across the organization," said PRH President and CEO Sabine Mersmann. "I'm incredibly proud of the work that has gone into bringing this program to life. It reflects the expertise and dedication of our nursing and interprofessional teams, and it ensures that critical care expertise is available wherever and whenever it's needed. By identifying risks earlier and intervening more consistently, we can ensure that patients get the most appropriate level of care - whether that means stabilizing safely on the unit or confirming the need for ICU admission."

Mrs. Mersmann also commended the collaborative spirit that guided the program's development. "This initiative has truly been a team effort, and I especially want to acknowledge the leadership of Dr. Natalie Needham-Nethercott, who has played a key role in shaping the clinical framework for RACE. The result is a program that supports our staff, empowers nursing judgment, and ultimately puts our patients in the best possible position for safe and successful recovery."

In addition to the clear benefits for patients, the RACE program also enhances the working environment for hospital staff. It strengthens collaboration across disciplines, reduces pressure on physicians and inpatient nurses, and ensures teams have immediate access to specialized assessments when needed.

Considered a meaningful step in the hospital's commitment to safe, timely, and compassionate care, the introduction of the RACE program extends the reach of the ICU by bringing critical care expertise directly to patients throughout the hospital. The model has already proven effective in other Ontario hospitals, and PRH anticipates similar improvements in patient outcomes, workflow efficiency, and professional development for team members.



We are grateful to receive positive feedback from our patients and their families such as these two compliments we have received permission to share.

*"During one of the most difficult moments of my life, Registered Nurse Hayley Charkavi was with me as I watched a close family friend pass away alone in the ICU. Her presence, compassion, and genuine kindness meant more than I can express. She never rushed me, never treated the moment as routine, and showed such deep respect and humanity during a time of loss. Her quiet support, thoughtful words, and attentive care made an unbearable situation feel less isolating. She ensured my family friend was treated with dignity and that I felt supported every step of the way. In a moment filled with grief, she truly embodied what it means to be a guardian angel. I will never forget the comfort she provided or the impact she had during such a vulnerable time. Nurses like her are the heart of compassionate care, and she deserves recognition for the difference she makes every day."* Angela Lemke

*"Cathy Drew (Food Services) has been such a positive part of my recovery here at the hospital. Although I have been here since June, she always seems to find me to take care of my meal needs. She knows my dietary restrictions and makes sure that she recommends alternatives when needed. She even stopped by Rehab one day to make sure I would like her suggestions for the day. Thank you Cathy for always going the extra mile. It truly shows that you not only love your job, but you want the patient to have the best experience as well."*

## Paramedics Partner With County Hospitals To Launch Fit2Sit Program

The County of Renfrew Paramedic Service has recently teamed up with hospitals in Renfrew County to launch Fit2Sit, a program that helps return paramedics to service within the community as quickly as possible after transporting a patient to hospital by ambulance.

Under this program, paramedics assess patients during transport to determine whether they are stable, fully conscious, able to sit or stand independently, and not showing signs of distress.

When these low-acuity patients arrive at the hospital, instead of staying on an ambulance stretcher, they are guided to a waiting room chair, so long as they are clothed appropriately for such placement, where hospital staff continue to monitor them. Paramedics can then return to service more quickly, knowing the patient is safe and will be seen based on medical need rather than arrival method. This approach helps paramedics safely get patients offloaded faster, so they can leave the Emergency Department sooner and get back on the road to respond to other calls in the community.

Patients who are more acute or require immediate medical attention will remain under paramedic care or transfer promptly to a hospital stretcher under the care of the emergency department.

"For patients, the experience remains straightforward. Those who qualify for Fit2Sit simply wait in the emergency department's designated seating area, where they are monitored, just like any other patient in the waiting room," said Nick LeRiche, Deputy Chief Operations, County of Renfrew Paramedic Service. "Their level of care does not change; the sickest and most urgent patients are still prioritized by hospital staff."

Endorsed by Ontario's Ministry of Health, the Fit2Sit program has been successfully adopted in other regions across the province including Waterloo, Simcoe County, Kawartha Lakes, Peel, Nipissing, and others.

By embracing Fit2Sit, the County of Renfrew Paramedic Service is joining a growing movement across Ontario to rethink how emergency departments manage patient flow and offload delays.

"Fit2Sit reflects our commitment to working closely with our paramedic partners to support safe and efficient patient flow in the ED," said Beth Brownlee Vice-President Clinical Services and Chief Nursing Executive "By helping paramedics return to the community more quickly, we are strengthening care not just within the hospital, but across our entire region."

Emergency Department teams at Arnprior Regional Health, Deep River and District Health, Pembroke Regional Hospital, Renfrew Victoria Hospital and St. Francis Memorial Hospital received education and training on the Fit2Sit initiative to ensure a smooth implementation prior to the program launch late last year.

**FIT2SIT**  
This NEW program enables our Paramedics to respond more rapidly to life-threatening emergencies.

FIT2SIT ensures that patients are safely cared for in emergency department waiting rooms after ambulance transport. This enables Paramedics to return to service within the community more quickly - and be ready for the next person in need.

Logos for participating organizations: RVH, ARNPRIOR, Pembroke Regional Hospital, St. Francis Memorial Hospital, and SFMH.

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## Help Keep Healthcare Close to Home!

Building on Pembroke Regional Hospital's commitment to provide quality care closer to home, we are focused on raising the funds necessary to purchase much-needed state-of-the-art equipment and technology. As the purchase of equipment is not fully funded by the government, we rely on the generous support of those in our community to ensure that this is possible.

In continuing the Foundation's mission of raising, managing and distributing funds to PRH for its highest priority equipment needs, here are some of the upcoming items we are fundraising for:



### High priority needs of our Regional Hospital:

- **Replacement CT Scanner** - PRH's existing CT Scanner (purchased in 2012) currently provides nearly 16,000 images per year and is approaching end-of-life. An updated CT Scanner is required to ensure that patients have continued access to this critical diagnostic imaging service at Pembroke Regional Hospital.
- **Health Information System (Epic)** - Best recognized as the system that has the **MyChart** patient portal, all information will be transferred from a paper-based system to a connected digital system that receives and organizes all inputs along a patient's journey and analyzes that data to provide staff and physicians with actionable information to treat patients. **MyChart** will enable patients to access their health information including appointments, lab and diagnostic imaging results, and discharge/medication instructions.
- **Other equipment needs** - Bone Density Test Unit, Thyroid Uptake System, Ultrasound machines, patient beds, Maternal Fetal Monitor, GlideScope and more.

You can be part of this remarkable journey to advance local healthcare by making a donation using the attached donation form or becoming a Monthly Donor.

Thank you for your support of local healthcare!

### YES, I will help my Pembroke Regional Hospital

- Here is a one-time gift to help my PRH when it needs me the most.
- I want to make a monthly gift to ensure the continued health and well being of Renfrew County families for the foreseeable future.
- I wish to make a pledge gift of \$\_\_\_\_\_ per year for 3 years to act as a transformation gift towards the greatest equipment needs at the Pembroke Regional Hospital.

**Gift Amount:**  \$30  \$50  \$100  Other: \_\_\_\_\_

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#### Catch the Ace:

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**By selecting "Recurring Monthly Donation," you can make a gift that keeps on giving and help us purchase our highest priority needs, as we need them! For additional information, please call (613) 732-2811 extension 7408 or email: [foundation@prh.ca](mailto:foundation@prh.ca). To make an online donation visit [www.PRHFoundation.com](http://www.PRHFoundation.com).**