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Interior Health preparing to bring wildfire evacuees home

IH WIDE – Interior Health is planning the repatriation of care home residents, acute care patients and community health clients evacuated due to wildfire threats throughout the region.

“Health care teams across the province have done monumental work planning and coordinating the evacuations of some of our most vulnerable people. Many care home residents have complex care needs and proactive decisions are required to ensure their safety, continuity of care, and sufficient time is allotted to move people out of harm’s way who often require 24/7 care,” said Susan Brown, Interior Health president and CEO. “Thankfully, wildfire activity is beginning to stabilize and we are able to start the process of safely bringing our residents home to their families and loved ones.”

Interior Health supported the temporary relocation of 826 people from seven communities (West Kelowna, Merritt, Vernon, Barrier, 100 Mile House, Armstrong, and Lillooet) to sites in Interior Health, Northern Health, Fraser Health, Vancouver Coastal Health, and Providence Health Care.

“I want to thank each and every staff member who helped evacuate people to safety and the receiving sites and health authorities for their support during this extraordinary wildfire season,” added Brown. “Now we are turning our attention to bringing people home gradually and ensuring appropriate staffing and resources are in place for their arrival.”

Planning repatriation is a complex process that involves cleaning closed facilities, coordinating transportation throughout the province, and ensuring staff and equipment are in place to welcome residents returning home.

“Being evacuated can be frightening and upsetting for many people and we want everyone to know how grateful we are for people’s patience and understanding over the past few months. We make the best decisions possible with the information we have to ensure these vulnerable individuals are safe – with an abundance of caution foremost in our planning,” added Brown.

Families will be notified directly as their loved ones are moved back. Anyone wishing to confirm their loved one’s evacuated location can call: 1.877.442.2001.

Interior Health would like to acknowledge the communities who received these evacuees and their accompanying staff for their support along with the incredible efforts of staff and physicians in the impacted communities, many of whom were also under evacuation alert themselves.

Interior Health also appreciates the support of local municipalities, regional districts, the BC Wildfire Service, and other partners who ensured patients, clients, and residents were kept safe during this challenging time.

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