



New Elbow health care committee looking at possible future facility



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The goal in sight is a health care facility in the lakeside village of Elbow. Photo by Derek Ruttle

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ELBOW - Could a brand new health care facility be in the future for the lakeside village of Elbow?

That's certainly what people in the area are hoping for, and it's also a question that a committee formed back in December of last year would like to answer with a resounding 'Yes'.

When one looks at the area consisting of the village of Elbow and the neighboring communities of Loreburn, Strongfield and Hawarden, and then also considers the services that both are and aren't available along Highway 19 - also known as Line 19 - it becomes apparent that health services are somewhat lacking, unless you drive just less than an hour to Davidson or head south to Central Butte's facility that doesn't necessarily provide all facets of health care that some situations require.

Jackelyn Losie, a registered nurse of five years who works full-time at the university hospital in Saskatoon and also a casual position at the Davidson Health Centre, says the conversation surrounding localized health care in Elbow and the nearby regional area is something that has already been permeating around the community for some time.

The result of those conversations that kept on happening was the formation of a committee. The Line 19 Health Care Committee was formed to address the health care needs in local communities such as Elbow, Loreburn, Strongfield, Hawarden, as well as Mistusinne and the surrounding RM, and Jackelyn now sits as the chair of the group.

"Honestly, for a few years, I think people have been talking about how that area is kind of just a missing piece that isn't getting quite enough healthcare services," said Losie, speaking with this reporter. "And because our population grows so much in the summer, it's an area that should have something a little bit closer. Then in December, people started really talking about and asking more about healthcare in our area; what do we have available to us, what could we get available to us, and so a few people from those communities decided to put together a committee. I wasn't actually originally one of the people who had the idea of the committee, but as soon as I heard about it through people I know in the community, I definitely jumped at the opportunity to join. So, our very first meeting and our official formation of our committee was in December of 2024."

The location of Elbow is fantastic as far as summertime amenities are concerned, what with Lake Diefenbaker literally in the village's backyard, but that lack of necessary health services is something that's been on the minds of locals for a long time, and the closest facilities aren't cutting it based either on distance or the level of services that are provided.

"The closest facility from Elbow would be Central Butte, and that has ambulance and EMS services, and it does have a primary healthcare clinic, which has family doctors and nurse practitioners, but it doesn't have any sort of emergency services," explained Losie. "So, if you wanted to go for a quick visit if you were concerned about something, then your closest would be Davidson, which is about 45 minutes from Elbow, because they have an emergency room in their hospital."

The fact that Elbow's population grows so much at this time of year in the summertime months is one of the prime reasons why people feel that a health facility is necessary in the community. Particularly in a busy lakeside village, where visitors coming in and staying in Elbow are engaging in all manner of activities such as swimming, boating, tubing, and rocketing around on Sea-Doos; activities that from time to time do result in injury or worse and health care is urgently needed.

"Absolutely, if something emergent happens, then the distance is a factor, but also just the fact that it's very hard for people to have to go for appointments, or if they're here on their summer holiday, and then they have maybe not an emergency situation, but a situation where you think you need to get seen by somebody," Jackelyn explained. "Whether you get a bad bug bite, or you cut your leg while you're camping, or you just feel like you've got a bit of a bladder infection going on, and you have to either try and get in with your family doctor, which is difficult right now for a lot of people. I won't speak for every single person, but it is kind of an overall concept that it's difficult to see your doctor right now, or you drive to Saskatoon or Regina for a walk-in clinic, or you drive to Davidson Health Centre, and you just use their emergency room for something that isn't necessarily emergency, but you don't want to NOT treat it."

Despite the young age of the recently formed committee, Jackelyn says they've already engaged in discussions with the province about their concerns and their health care desires for the local area.

"Yes, we have actually, despite the fact that we've only been started since December," she said. "We've honestly had a lot of really good progress and a lot of positive feedback, and I think we're making pretty big strides for where we're at. In April, I took on the role of Chair of the committee, which is why my name is often kind of associated with everything that's being posted now, and so I've had conversations with people who work under the Minister of Health and we've had some phone meetings. I reached out trying to express the interest in having the conversations with them, and hopefully gaining their support, and I've got that in return. The Ministry of Health is definitely aware of our committee and what we're trying to work on, and we're continuing to have conversations with them about our big goal of trying to hopefully get some sort of primary health care centre located in Elbow."

The end goal in sight is indeed a health care facility in Elbow, which Losie says makes the most sense given the village's population among surrounding areas that are smaller. This, as well as the fact that the village increases exponentially in size at this time of year when lake visitors come down for the summer.

"Yeah, we talked about that in our committee and which location makes the most sense," she said. "Just because of Elbow's population, and the close surrounding area that will double or even triple in size in the summer season. So then, at that point, you would hopefully be getting some more of that walk-in clinic action, and so that location just makes the most sense, but with the purpose of serving the whole Line 19 area and then some."

At the end of the day, Losie knows the road to establishing a brand new health care facility in the village of Elbow is likely a long one with its own set of twists and turns. That said, she and the rest of the committee aren't losing focus on the goal at hand, and she says recent initiatives such as a survey that was issued online have helped the group see the continued desire and need for such services.

Jackelyn says the group already has an idea for what the community area needs in such a facility.

"Obviously, we don't have any confirmed set plans, but it would be a primary health care centre, meaning that it would be either a family doctor or a nurse practitioner working out of there who people can go and see," she said. "That person could become your new primary physician that you see. So your yearly appointments or getting referred for other specialists, having tests ordered, having lab work ordered, and so it's not your emergency care, but it's your routine preventative primary care that we're focusing on. And then also, our idea would be that at least to start in the summer season, a walk-in clinic, maybe that's open May to September, something like that to help serve that summer population so that they have somewhere to go because just because you go on summer vacation doesn't mean that little health problems don't arise. So then you have a place so close to where you're spending your summer that you can get seen."

In addition to the provincial government being aware of what the committee is spearheading, the Saskatchewan Health Authority has also taken meetings with them and learning about their initiative. Losie says that anyone else who may be interested in the work being carried out by the committee or who wants to learn more about the mission to establish a health care facility in Elbow can reach out to her by email at line19hcc@gmail.com. As well, a number of local farmers market events in Elbow will see the committee out in the public on July 12th, 19th, and August 9th with information for the public.

Right now, Jackelyn says the committee is going through survey responses and putting together a proposal to show health care higher-ups what the community of Elbow has in mind for the future.

"We just recently published a survey that asked all these very key questions and all with the point of collecting data," she said. "So we put that together, and then with the ideas we'll put together a very formal proposal of what our goal is, with the data to support it, as well as other factors like finances and location and who would work there, and put it all together and take that forward to the government and the ministry. We have to show all the work that we've done and then, hopefully, we'll get their approval. So those are kind of our first initial steps, and if that gets approved, we'll go from there. That's what we're working on right now."

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