



## **Renfrew County Virtual Triage and Assessment Centre marks one year since it launched as a pandemic healthcare service**

**March 26, 2021** – When the COVID-19 pandemic was declared, healthcare leaders from across Renfrew County came together to create a solution that strengthens access to primary care and COVID-19 support for all residents, while reducing the demand on emergency departments and the 9-1-1 Service.

Within two weeks, the Renfrew County Virtual Triage and Assessment Centre (VTAC) launched on March 27, 2020 through a collaboration between Renfrew County Primary Care teams, the County of Renfrew Paramedic Service, Renfrew County Hospitals, and the Renfrew County and District Health Unit, with the support of Ontario Health East. Through VTAC, residents who do not have a family physician or cannot access their family physician can book a virtual physician assessment (for COVID-19 or non-COVID-19 concerns). It also provides in-home assessments by a community paramedic when needed and operates COVID-19 drive-thru testing clinics across the County.

“When we launched VTAC, there was a great deal of uncertainty about the longer-term impact of the pandemic and where it would lead us, but our team knew we had to focus on ensuring residents had immediate access to care for urgent health concerns that are both related and unrelated to COVID-19,” said Dr. Jonathan Fitzsimon, Medical Lead, VTAC and Chief of Medicine, Arnprior Regional Health. “As we work towards the end of the pandemic, we continue to support our communities’ healthcare needs and help ensure that emergency departments are reserved for genuine emergencies.”

In the earlier days of VTAC, Melinda Ritza, Team Leader, Renfrew County Mobile Geriatric Day Hospital, shared how VTAC has impacted healthcare in the region.

“Since VTAC launched, I have referred numerous patients (including myself),” explained Melinda. “One patient I referred had just returned from outside of the country and was under quarantine when his foot became infected. Since he doesn’t have a family doctor, he connected with VTAC and the doctor easily assessed and treated his concern by phone. It’s an amazing and efficient service—perfect for non-urgent issues.”

In VTAC's first year of operation, the team has:

- Administered almost **42,000** COVID-19 tests.
- Completed more than **20,000** virtual family physician assessments for patients without a family physician or for those who couldn't reach their family physicians.
- Provided approximately **4,700** in-home assessments by community paramedics.

"As the pandemic has evolved, VTAC has scaled its COVID-19 services to respond to the local needs, such as the introduction of the drive-thru testing clinics led by the County of Renfrew Paramedic Service," said Karen Simpson, Administrative Lead, VTAC and Executive Director, Arnprior & District Family Health Team. "Each of our partner organizations plays a critical role in VTAC's success and we are guided by the shared goal of keeping residents safe and healthy."

The VTAC organizations who actively support delivery of services include: Arnprior & District Family Health Team, Arnprior Regional Health, The County of Renfrew, The County of Renfrew Paramedic Service, Deep River and District Hospital, Madawaska Valley Family Health Team, Renfrew County and District Health Unit, St. Francis Memorial Hospital and Whitewater Bromley Community Health Centre.

### **About Renfrew County Virtual Triage and Assessment Centre**

The Renfrew County Virtual Triage and Assessment Centre (VTAC) was created in response to the COVID-19 pandemic to strengthen access to healthcare for all residents so our emergency departments and 9-1-1 Service can be reserved for genuine emergencies. It is for residents who have a health concern (including COVID-19 concerns) but either do not have a family physician or cannot access their usual family physician. It also provides referrals to other services including mental health and community acute care. VTAC is a collaboration between Renfrew County Family Health Teams, Community Health Centres, the County of Renfrew Paramedic Service, Renfrew County Hospitals and the Renfrew County and District Health Unit, with the support of Ontario Health East. Learn more at [www.rcvtac.ca](http://www.rcvtac.ca)

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