Strengthening Healthcare in Lake Cowichan

Frequently Asked Questions: Lakeside Health, Kaatza Clinic and the Town's Role

The Town of Lake Cowichan recognizes that access to reliable, quality healthcare is one of the most important priorities for our residents and the broader West Cowichan region. Over the past year and beyond, the Town has been actively engaged in supporting existing healthcare services, addressing facility concerns, and exploring opportunities to attract and retain medical professionals. Admittedly, there has been renewed energy and engagement on this file.

The recent announcement regarding the proposed Lakeside Health Clinic is an encouraging development in those efforts. Our efforts will not stop there as there is more to be done. We also recognize that residents have questions about the future of Kaatza Clinic, the Town's proposed financial contribution, and how these developments relate to previous decisions. We are pleased to provide the following information but first, we would like to acknowledge the contributions of all medical practitioners and supporting staff who have contributed to or delivered care in Lake Cowichan over many years.

Thank you!

Specifically, the Town would like to acknowledge and thank the following practitioners for their service to our community:

- Dr. Neumann, recent addition to the team in Lake Cowichan – welcome to you as well.
- Stephanie Eschak, Nurse Practitioner – for over 5 years of service to Lake Cowichan, including when there were no doctors or practitioners in the community.
- Heidi Smith, Nurse Practitioner – for over4 years of service to Lake Cowichan.
- James Dunnett, Nurse Practitioner, recent addition to the team in Lake Cowichan – welcome to you as well.
- Nurses, Administrative Staff, Receptionist, and other support personnel – thank you for the work that you do and the contributions you all make within the community.
- Vancouver Island Health Authority Leadership Team – thank you for your deliberation, assistance, and commitment to healthcare in our community.
- Division of Family Practice Team – thank you as well for your work supporting healthcare in the community.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. What is happening with healthcare in Lake Cowichan?

There are positive developments underway. On October 13, 2026, the Town announced a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Dr. Neumann intended to establish a framework for negotiating a formal agreement to support sustainable access to medical care in the community. The broader vision is to retain existing practitioners while strengthening access to healthcare through a collaborative model that could include physicians, nurse practitioners, nurses, allied healthcare professionals and support staff.

The goal is not simply to maintain existing healthcare services, but to help create opportunities for them to grow.

2. Is the Kaatza Clinic closing?

No decision to close Kaatza Clinic has been made by VIHA or the Town. However, the delivery of medical services within Kaatza building will change as a natural consequence to practitioners moving to Lakeside Health Clinic. Regular maintenance work will continue, and VIHA will maintain a presence in the building. The Town will continue discussions with Island Health regarding additional opportunities for the building to support healthcare and other related community services.

3. What did the Town do when concerns were raised about conditions at Kaatza?

In September 2025, healthcare professionals and members of the public raised concerns regarding the condition of the Kaatza facility. The Town took these concerns seriously.

Following the public meeting, Town administration and Public Works representatives engaged with Island Health's facilities management representatives, conducted a building walkthrough/inspection, and worked to identify deficiencies and appropriate corrective actions. The resulting work informed a proposed renovation project.

As part of the Town's 2026 capital budget planning, **$250,000 was first identified for improvements to the Kaatza Health Unit building**, demonstrating a commitment to addressing facility concerns within the Town's responsibilities as property owner.

The Town also began discussions with Island Health regarding updated lease arrangements and, at the request of VIHA, subsequently explored the possibility of expanding the building

footprint to accommodate additional medical practitioners. The planned major facility improvements were ultimately paused for reasons explained below.

4. Why did the Town pause the proposed renovations and expansion at Kaatza?

During the summer of 2026, the Town learned that all medical professionals (Nurse Practitioners and Doctor) working at Kaatza were exploring the possibility of establishing **a group practice** at another location (now Lakeside Health).

This development had important implications for the proposed investment in the existing building. The Town was contemplating spending at least $250,000 on facility improvements, with potentially additional costs associated with expanding the building – if it came to fruition.

Before proceeding with a significant financial investment, the Town sought clarity on whether the medical professionals intended to continue practicing at the Kaatza facility. This was essential to ensure that the proposed renovations and expansion would deliver lasting benefits to the community. The decision to pause the project reflected the Town's commitment to responsible financial stewardship and ensuring that public funds are invested where they can best support sustainable healthcare services.

The Town's commitment to healthcare did not change. Rather, the circumstances required us to reassess how municipal resources could best support sustainable healthcare delivery. The Town explored a partnership model instead. NO additional budget changes were required.

5. How did the Lakeside Health initiative develop?

Due to the decision by medical practitioners to form a group practice, As discussions continued regarding the future of Kaatza, the Town engaged with medical professionals who were exploring an alternative group-practice model. In July 2026, Dr. Neumann presented Council with a proposal to establish a sustainable medical clinic serving Lake Cowichan and the broader West Cowichan region.

Council expressed support for advancing the initiative, including consideration of a municipal contribution of up to $250,000, subject to negotiating a satisfactory agreement and meeting applicable requirements. These discussions led to the October 13, 2026, MOU announcement.

The proposed clinic provides an opportunity to build upon the work of existing practitioners while creating a foundation for additional healthcare services. **This is a positive opportunity for our community, and the Town is committed to working collaboratively to support its success.**

6. Does the Town employ doctors or determine where healthcare professionals practice?

No. The Town does not employ the medical professionals (Doctors, Nurses, Nurse Practitioners or other professionals) working in these clinics, nor does it direct where they practice. This is why a partnership is important as it provides greater certainty.

The Town is also not a party to employment or contractual negotiations between Island Health and individual healthcare providers. Those matters remain the responsibility of the appropriate healthcare authorities, employers and practitioners.

However, the Town can play an important supporting role through advocacy, municipal planning, responsible management of public facilities, partnerships and consideration of lawful financial arrangements.

Our focus is to create an environment where medical professionals want to remain, establish practices and expand their services and where others wish to join.

7. What can residents expect next?

The immediate priority is supporting the proposed Lakeside Health Clinic opening and advancing negotiations toward a formal agreement that addresses the responsibilities of the parties, financial accountability, operational expectations and community benefits.

The Town will also continue discussions with Island Health concerning future opportunities for the Kaatza facility.

Residents should be aware that clinic services, appointment availability, acceptance of new patients and any transfer of existing patient care arrangements must be confirmed directly by the responsible healthcare providers.

Residents seeking a family doctor or nurse practitioner are encouraged to register with the provincial Health Connect Registry.

Health Connect Registry — HealthLink BC

Our Commitment to the Community

The Town wishes to express its sincere appreciation to every physician, nurse practitioner, nurse, allied healthcare professional and support staff who contribute to the health and well-being of our community.

We recognize the dedication required to deliver medical care, particularly in rural communities where access to services can be challenging. **Our approach remains guided by three priorities: retaining existing medical professionals, attracting additional healthcare providers, and playing a supportive role that strengthens long-term healthcare access.** We are encouraged by the developments underway and look forward to continuing this important work with our healthcare partners.