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## NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Advanced Education, Skills and Training

### **Occupational and physical therapy seats coming to northern B.C.**

PRINCE GEORGE – Increases in occupational and physical therapy training seats will ensure more patients get access to care that will improve their quality of life, while more students can train closer to home.

“Expanding UBC’s occupational and physical therapy programs through a partnership with UNBC to create seats in the North will open the doors for more students to pursue careers in health care,” said Melanie Mark, Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Training. “Adding more occupational and physical therapy seats has been a call to action for years. Our government listened and is investing in opportunities to bring education closer to home, because we know that when students live and train in the north, they are more likely to stay and work in the North.”

The additional seats will be created by expanding the current University of British Columbia (UBC) programs with the programs in the North, which is expected to transition to joint UBC/University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC) degrees over the coming years. The physical therapy program will also be expanded to the Fraser Valley.

“More occupational and physical therapists will help improve access to care for thousands of patients and support the team-based care work underway throughout the province,” said Adrian Dix, Minister of Health. “Announcements like this reflect the importance of our transformation to team-based care, which creates opportunities for health-care professionals to be more effective and work to the full extent of their knowledge and skills.”

The Province is providing \$2.2 million to UBC for startup and planning to expand a master of physical therapy program in the North in partnership with UNBC, with the anticipated first intake of 20 first year students in September 2020. The physical therapy program is also expected to expand with 20 first-year seats in the Fraser Valley by September 2022. Physical therapists are often referred to as physiotherapists.

The Province is providing an additional \$1.1 million to UBC to work toward expanding its master of occupational therapy program in the North in partnership with UNBC, with 16 first-year students in September 2022. The occupational therapy program will also expand by eight seats at UBC Vancouver in September 2020.

“Expanding these programs in Prince George will improve patient-health outcomes for Northerners for years to come,” said Dermot Kelleher, dean, faculty of medicine and vice-president of Health, UBC. “Together with UNBC, we are grateful to government for making this expansion a reality.”

Occupational therapists support people who are recuperating from or impaired by illness,

injury, developmental disorders or mental health difficulties by encouraging rehabilitation through the performance of activities required in daily life.

A physiotherapist plans and implements treatment programs with a focus on prevention and mitigation of disease, injury and disability through therapeutic exercise programs.

Prior to completing the master's program, most occupational and physical therapy students have a health or science undergraduate degree. They can work in a range of settings within the home and community as well as hospitals, long-term care facilities and recreation centres.

#### **Quotes:**

##### **Santa Ono, president, UBC –**

“We’re excited to be working with our partners to leverage this investment throughout the province for expansion of our health programs, including in the Fraser Valley and Vancouver.”

##### **Daniel Weeks, president, UNBC –**

“This is great news for students and communities in the North. We’re excited at the prospect of this partnership and launching a joint northern program to support students who want to pursue careers as occupational and physical therapists. As we’ve learned from the success of our academic programming and alumni community, we know that when we train students in the North, they are more likely to stay in the North.”

##### **Cathy Ulrich, president and CEO, Northern Health –**

“Partnerships with academic institutions, communities and Northern Health’s staff and physicians are key to addressing current and emerging workforce needs in the North. We look forward to partnering in educating physiotherapists and occupational therapists in the North for the North.”

##### **Tanya Fawkes-Kirby, managing director, Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists, B.C chapter –**

“We’ve been pushing for more occupational therapist seats in B.C. for a very long time. We owe it to patients and communities. News of the expansion to include the north is very welcome and long overdue.”

##### **Christine Bradstock, CEO, Physiotherapy Association of British Columbia –**

“Expanding the physical therapy program at UBC to the North and the Fraser Valley will provide locally trained physiotherapists in areas that have been identified as being of the greatest need. Physiotherapy is a rewarding and growing health-care profession and more physiotherapists will help to improve the health of British Columbians.”

#### **Quick Facts:**

- Currently, there are 80 first-year physiotherapy seats in British Columbia. This will increase to 120 first-year physiotherapy spaces at full expansion expected by September 2022. The most recent increase was in 2008.
- Currently, there are 48 first-year occupational therapy seats in British Columbia. This will

increase to 72 first-year seats. The most-recent increase was in 2009.

- Occupational and physical therapists are identified as high-priority health professions. Over the next decade, 1,920 job openings in physiotherapy and 1,160 job openings in occupational therapy are expected.

**Learn More:**

Physiotherapy Association of British Columbia: <https://bcphysio.org/>

Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists: <https://www.caot.ca/>

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