



part of Children's & Women's Health Centre of British Columbia

NEWS RELEASE

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ACCESS Clinic at B.C. Women's Hospital & Health Centre marks first anniversary of serving women with disabilities

Vancouver, B.C. – B.C. Women's Health Centre launched ACCESS, Canada's first specialty clinic for women with disabilities, one year ago this spring. The innovative clinic is designed to provide gynecologic and breast health care for women with disabilities. ACCESS has an accessible exam table along with a ceiling lift and trained personnel for these specialized services.

The clinic was launched in response to a study conducted through the B.C. Centre of Excellence for Women's Health located at B.C. Women's. The report, called "We're Women, Too," found that 50 per cent of women with disabilities do not regularly access gynecological care.

"The study included women with a full range of disabilities – both mental and mobility – and is a prime example of how research informs and supports program development at B.C. Women's," said Ann Pederson, Policy & Research Manager at the Centre of Excellence. Among its findings, the study identified the reasons why these women were not using services, including clinics that are not accessible or that have equipment that is not accessible.

"A lot of women don't go to the gynecologist because they know they will encounter problems," said Laurie Hill, an advisor to the clinic. "Often they think there might not be access at a doctor's office. And in some cases, breast and cervical cancer screening is simply overlooked because you have variety of health problems related to your disability."

B.C. Women's is working to remove barriers through its groundbreaking clinic that is now entering its second year of operation. ACCESS offers gynecological exams (PAP smears and pelvic exams) and clinical breast exams for women with disabilities. The equipment at ACCESS adjusts for many physical disabilities whereas ordinary exam tables and mammography equipment are usually inadequate for women in wheelchairs or with mobility issues. This equipment was provided through generous donors to B.C. Women's Foundation.

"Since we opened, we've seen women with a wide range of physical and mental disabilities, including profound multiple sclerosis and cerebral palsy," said Lenore Riddell, Clinical Nurse Specialist, B.C. Women's. "The feedback from these women, their health care providers and organizations for the disabled has been overwhelmingly positive."

Women do not need a referral from a doctor to use the ACCESS clinic, though family doctors are welcome to refer. Results such as pap smears will be sent to their family doctors as requested. The clinic operates two times per month and is accepting new patients. The clinic has already diagnosed cancers and pre-cancerous changes in women who might not have otherwise have been diagnosed early enough for treatment. For an appointment, call 604-875-3060 and ask for the ACCESS clinic.

A new clinic is opening in Abbotsford, which is modelling itself on ACCESS. The Gateway Access clinic will improve access to gynecological health care for women with disabilities in the Fraser Valley. "We're quite happy to assist in promoting the principles of improving access for women with disabilities. There are women all over the province who could benefit from this kind of clinic," said Riddell.

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