

# IMPROVING ACCESS TO LIVER CARE

in the East Kootenay by streamlining referrals, standardizing care, and developing educational tools and resources for physicians.

Project Leadership:  
Dr. Tara Chalmers-Nixon (Gastroenterologist)  
Mike Slater (NP with GI specialty)  
Dellanee Kalkhe, EK Division of Family Practice Project Lead

East Kootenay  
Division of Family Practice  
An FPSC initiative

SharedCare  
Partners for Patients

## NAFLD AND ITS IMPACT

Approximately three million Canadians suffer from some sort of liver disease. Non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD) is the most prevalent chronic liver disease in North America and the leading cause of end stage liver disease worldwide. Non-alcohol related liver disease affects both children and adults and can lead to cirrhosis, hepatocellular carcinoma, and death in some people.

## THE RURAL CHALLENGE

Liver care in the East Kootenay is difficult to access in a timely manner as there is only one gastroenterologist in the entire EK, based out of Fernie, B.C., and the wait time can be significant. Patients come from rural settings such as local towns and indigenous communities that are hours away from Fernie. The closest alternatives are in Calgary and Kelowna. The referral process also lacked risk stratification which resulted in more specialist referrals that could otherwise be managed locally by family physicians.

## PROJECT GOALS

1. Improve access to specialist care for patients with non-alcoholic liver disease in the East Kootenay.
2. Improve screening process for patients with fatty liver disease by inclusion of non-invasive Shearwave elastography.
3. Develop and provide resources for Family Physicians and Internal Medicine specialists managing patients with fatty liver disease in the community.
4. Develop an approach to NAFLD such that primary care providers can appropriately manage patients and refer when needed.

This Liver Care project aimed to streamline referrals and standardize care for liver disease patients by improving screening processes, developing non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD) management and referral algorithms, and providing education and resources for family physicians to use in their clinics.

## PROJECT APPROACH

We successfully engaged with more than 30 Family Physicians in the East Kootenay region representing every Family Physician clinic in the area. Together, along with regional specialists and in collaboration with the Yaqit ʔa·knuqʔi 'it (Tobacco Plains Band), we developed a NAFLD pathway and referral form.

Multiple source documents, websites, and resource reviews were also conducted. These were all compared with information gathered from engagement meetings and provided a base for developing our own tools tailored specific to the needs of the providers in the East Kootenay.

## PROJECT SUCCESSES & OUTCOMES

Developed a 1-page care pathway for non-alcoholic fatty liver disease for referring physicians. The pathway guides the referring physicians in managing the care of patients with NAFLD and when to refer appropriately.

Developed a 1-page referral form providing a consistent and efficient referral method that incorporates necessary tests and information to avoid delays in referral time.

Provided education and information sessions on new resources to MOAs, physicians, specialists, IH staff, and the Yaqit ʔa·knuqʔi 'it (Tobacco Plains Band).

The project team collaborated with the Department of Radiology at the East Kootenay Regional Hospital to fund and integrate Shearwave Elastography at both the EKRH in Cranbrook and the Elk Valley Hospital in Fernie.

## PROJECT RESOURCES



The NAFLD care pathway, referral form, and updated requisition is available on Pathways, and will continue to be updated as needed.



The Pathways profile of Dr Tara Chalmers-Nixon has been updated with additional resources and will continue to be updated as needed.