

## Bancroft Family Health Team expanding area care



Members of the Bancroft Family Health Team try out their new streaming technology with visiting Hastings-Lennox and Addington MP Mike Bossio. From left, Melanie Wright, CFDC project manager Mary Lynn Rutledge, CFDC general manager, Dean Laundry, Bossio, CFDC board member, John Kirby, CFDC vice chair, and Sandra McGrath, BFHT executive director. / SUBMITTED

**By Sarah Sobanski**

Bancroft's community futures corporation is investing close to \$90,000 into local health care.

The Community Futures Development Corporation (CFDC) of North and Central Hastings and South Algonquin will give the Bancroft Family Health Team \$88,000 over two years. The funding will go towards supporting technological innovations, according to a press release by the corporation. This includes expanding health care services and technology to provide remote access to specialists in urban centres. The funding falls under the Eastern Ontario Development Program's Community Innovation stream. It's led to three new jobs.

Our government is committed to creating good jobs through investing in small business and health care innovation, MP Mike Bossio said in the press release. He attended the funding announcement April 28. Investments in innovative technology in organizations like the Bancroft Family Health Team allow rural residents to access specialists in urban areas without the expense of travelling. Health care in rural areas can be a challenge so it is imperative that we continue to innovate to increase access to medical professionals in our communities. I couldn't be happier that this investment will result not only in better care for residents in Bancroft, but also create jobs.

This technology opens up a world of possibility, said Bancroft's Dr. Carolyn Brown in the release. Rather than having to spend the day going to the city for a specialist appointment, at least some of these visits can now take place at our new medical centre, right here in Bancroft.

With new technology, the team can offer telemedicine and video conferencing. The team can now provide up to 44 specialist health care appointments per month. The release stated it is ensuring patients have access to specialists without the hassle, expense and disruption of having to travel to see them with the project.

Making virtual health care available has led to reduced wait times, job creation, economic impact of economic impact of reduced costs, time and travel expenses for patients, removal of barriers to care for our isolated rural region impacted by the social determinants of health and decreased work absences for medical appointments, reduction in staff training and travel costs, increase in staff productivity for employers.

One of the most important aspects of this program is removing barriers to care for those patients that are the most vulnerable and unable to attend out of town appointments, said executive director for the team Sandra McGrath via press release. Patients that are facing many challenges such as poverty, lack of transportation, and employment security were previously not able to get advanced specialist health care before this program was implemented.

The press release noted that staff and patients have used the new technology for specialized medical consultation and training. It also

stated the telecommunication and information technology is available to professionals, staff and other community agencies to access training without leaving the area.

?Community futures is proud of the work being done by the Bancroft Family Health Team, a rural innovator. Through the use of technology and training, our residents have better access to medical care with this investment to expand their services and training through the Eastern Ontario Development Program. Congratulations to the Bancroft Family Health Team,? said Jim Etmanski, chair of the community futures corporation.