LifeLabs partners with UBC on Drone Transport Initiative to support access to essential health services for BC First Nations communities

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Burnaby, BC. January 24, 2022 – LifeLabs is pleased to share it has partnered with the Stellat'en First Nation, Village of Fraser Lake, the First Nations Health Authority (FHNA), the Rural Coordination Centre of BC (RCCbc), University of British Columbia's Faculty of Medicine and Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences, and Drone Delivery Canada (DDC) in a study investigating how drone technology can be used to improve health care for rural and remote First Nations communities.

"This type of project here is unique. As a Native community, we're at the forefront of the technology," says Chief Robert Michell of Stellat'en First Nation. "It would be amazing in 10 years' time to see where this goes. This is definitely a first step, and we're proud to be a part of it."

"We're proud to support such an important initiative that will help provide greater access to essential health care services for First Nations communities," said Charles Brown, President and CEO of LifeLabs. "New technologies such as drones can present opportunities to deliver health services closer to home, improving accessibility to certain medical support for people in remote and rural communities."

The Drone Transport Initiative (DTI) is nearing completion of its first phase of testing drone flights carrying supplies and mock samples between Stellat'en First Nations and Fraser Lake, so that eventually real test samples can reach testing laboratories in a timely manner.

Many rural and remote First Nations communities have unequal access to health care due to factors such as transportation constraints and challenges with recruiting and retaining health care providers. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated many of

these accessibility issues, especially with regards to transportation and testing of patient samples.

“Technology can be a game-changer and transform access and delivery for citizens who live in these communities. That’s not going to happen overnight—there’s going to be a lot of hard work over many years to continue to refine what we understand to be possible with this technology,” says Dr. John Pawlovich, Rural Doctors’ UBC Chair in Rural Health. “The Drone Transport Initiative is our opportunity to start that journey with drone technology. The initiative cannot be done without the leadership and partnership of the two communities.”

Through this partnership, LifeLabs is also contributing to the development of standard operating procedures and ensuring an end-to-end solution by participating in data evaluations, sample logistics, and training. What’s more, this will support important community engagement efforts with Stellat’en First Nation, which will assist in identifying lessons learned and factors supportive of cultural safety and humility in our planning, implementation, and engagement practices.

LifeLabs is proud to support the Drone Transport Initiative, which will help advance our knowledge for the future use of drone technology to transport clinical materials and samples for lab testing. It will also enable improved delivery times of essential supplies to remote locations to positively impact health outcomes.

The DTI initiative’s drone technology and service are provided by Drone Delivery Canada (DDC), and funding is provided through a grant from the TD Ready Challenge.