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July 2026

## River Hospital clinic aids the uninsured



**A new clinic at River Hospital has been created in response to the growing need for accessible healthcare services for uninsured residents in the Thousand Islands region. [riverhospital.org](http://riverhospital.org)**

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Times staff report

ALEXANDRIA BAY — In response to a growing need for accessible healthcare services for uninsured residents in the Thousand Islands region, the River Community Clinic has been launched at River Hospital.

The initiative is designed to provide free healthcare services to uninsured adults throughout the Thousand Islands region. It was created through a partnership between River Hospital

and founding donor Gretchen Scott and will offer primary and preventive healthcare services including chronic disease management, routine checkups, vaccinations, and ongoing care coordination for uninsured community members age 18 and older.

For Scott, the project is deeply personal.

While building a successful national fashion brand and signature boutiques, Scott has

remained closely connected to her north country roots and to the values she learned from her father, the late Dr. George Sturtz. A pediatrician known for his compassion and commitment to local families, Sturtz believed healthcare should never feel out of reach for people in need. He died in 2013 at the age of 88.

Scott was also inspired by her longtime friendship with the late Judy Randall, a dedicated River Hospital Auxiliary volunteer and

community advocate who spent years supporting the hospital and encouraging others to do the same. Together, those influences helped shape the vision behind the River Community Clinic and its focus on compassionate, community-based care.

Hospital leaders say the initiative arrives at an important time for rural healthcare communities across the country, as small hospitals and patients alike face

See RIVER H2

# Samaritan Medical Center awarded Primary Stroke Center Certification from The Joint Commission

WATERTOWN — Samaritan Medical Center has once again earned The Joint Commission's Gold Seal of Approval® and the American Stroke Association's Heart-Check mark for Primary Stroke Center Certification.

Samaritan Medical Center underwent a rigorous, unannounced onsite review on March 13. During the visit, a Joint Commission reviewer evaluated compliance with related certification standards including program management and delivering clinical care. Joint Commission standards are developed in consultation with health care experts and providers, measurement experts and patients. The reviewers also conducted onsite observations and interviews.

This certification was initially obtained in 2020 and is re-certified every two years. Since the last recertification in early 2024, Samaritan Medical Center treated 245 stroke patients that year and 151 in 2025.

"Primary Stroke Center Certification recognizes healthcare organizations committed to striving for excellence and fostering continuous improvement in patient safety and quality of care," says Ken Grubbs, DNP, MBA, RN, executive vice president of Accreditation and Certification Operations and chief nursing officer, The Joint Commission. "We commend Samaritan Medical Center for using The Joint Commission certification process to reduce variation in clinical processes and to strengthen its clinical program to

drive safer, higher quality and more compassionate care for individuals served."

"We congratulate Samaritan Medical Center for this outstanding achievement," says Nancy Brown, chief executive officer, the American Stroke Association. "This certification reflects its commitment to providing the highest quality of care for stroke patients."

"Maintaining our stroke certification reflects the dedication of our entire care team and our commitment to providing timely, high-quality stroke care," says Dr. Mario Victoria, chief medical officer, Samaritan Medical Center. "This recertification recognizes the work we do every day to ensure patients receive the best possible treatment close to home."

## River

From H1

increasing financial pressures, workforce shortages, transportation barriers, and significant gaps in insurance coverage.

"Gretchen brought forward a vision that immediately resonated with our mission and our goals as a hospital," Kelley Tiernan, CEO of River Hospital, said in a news release. "We shared the same concern about people in our communities delaying care, struggling to manage chronic illness alone, or falling through the cracks entirely because they do not have insurance coverage. This clinic represents a meaningful partnership focused on meeting those needs in a practical and compassionate way."

### FRIDAY APPOINTMENTS

Initially operating Fridays in River Hospital's Medical Office Building, 4 Fuller St., the clinic will provide care by appointment for uninsured adults and focus on preventive care, chronic illness management, and helping patients establish more consistent healthcare support over time.

In addition to direct medical services, the clinic will also work closely with River Hospital's broader network of providers and support services to help patients navigate insurance enrollment opportunities and connect with longer term healthcare resources whenever possible.

"This is really about dignity," said Norman E. Snyder, chairman of the River Hospital Board of Directors, "People in the North

Country are resilient and independent. Many are used to pushing through difficult situations quietly and without asking for help. But healthcare has become increasingly complicated, and too many people are struggling to access routine care. This clinic is about making sure our community has a place to turn."

Scott's support will fund the clinic's initial years of operations, while River Hospital is contributing substantial in-kind support including clinical space, diagnostics, technology systems, staffing integration, scheduling, compliance oversight, and administrative leadership.

Hospital leaders say they hope the River Community Clinic becomes not only an important healthcare resource, but also a broader community effort focused on long term stability, dignity, and access to care throughout the region. Additional opportunities for community members to support the clinic and its future sustainability are expected to develop over time.

"This project reflects what can happen when people who care deeply about this region come together around a shared purpose," Tiernan said. "There is a long tradition in the North Country of neighbors helping neighbors, and this clinic builds on that spirit in a very meaningful way."

Clinic services are available by appointment only for uninsured adults age 18 and older. Community members interested in learning more can visit [riverhospital.org](http://riverhospital.org). To schedule an appointment, call 315-482-1291.

## Applications Open for NP Scholarships

WATERTOWN — Applications for the eighth annual Susan Peters Nursing Scholarship are being accepted now through July 15, 2026.

Susan Peters, a retired nurse from Samaritan Medical Center established a scholarship through the Samaritan Medical Center Foundation for Registered Nurses (RNs) looking to advance their careers as Nurse Practitioners (NPs). Sadly, Peters passed away in 2020, yet this scholarship remains part of her legacy and commitment to healthcare in the community.

The Susan Peters Nursing Scholarship was established in 2018 to assist with the educational costs for an RN continuing their education, specifically to pursue a Nurse Practitioner degree. Two scholarships of \$2,000 are awarded each year.

Peters graduated from the former House of the Good Samaritan School of Nursing and retired from Samaritan Medical Center as a Certified Oncology Nurse. Prior to that, she served as a staff RN and for more than 20 years as a Nurse Manager of Medical/Surgical, Orthopedic, and alternate level of care units.

Beth Fipps, Vice President of Samaritan Foundation and Community Services, explained, "We are so grateful to Susan for leaving a legacy to a profession she was so committed to. Susan so generously established this scholarship to promote the Nurse Practitioner profession because she felt there is an increasing need for such a role due to the



Pictured from left are Mary Dawley, Oliva Marra, Beth Fipps, Courtney Sartwell, Marie Hess.

nationwide shortage of healthcare providers."

Nurse Practitioners provide vital care to patients, including developing treatment plans for their patients, ordering tests, performing minor procedures, and prescribing medication.

The 2025 scholarships awardees were Oliva Marra and Courtney Sartwell. Oliva Marra, an RN in Samaritan's Interventional Radiology, Progressive Care Unit (PCU), and Infusion Departments, is pursuing her Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner degree. Courtney Sartwell, also an RN at Samaritan in the PCU, is continuing her education to become a Nurse Practitioner.

Again, the application period for the Susan Peters Nursing Scholarship is June 1 – July 15, 2026, with the scholarship award announcement scheduled for August 2026.

To be eligible for this scholar-

ship, candidates must meet the following criteria:

Be an RN with a minimum of two full years' working experience. RNs currently working for Samaritan Medical Center preferred, but not mandatory.

Medical/Surgical experience preferred but not necessary.

Must be a resident of either Jefferson or Lewis counties in New York.

Eligible to apply after successful completion of the first semester in a Nurse Practitioner program with at least a B average.

As part of the application, RNs must describe why they are pursuing their Nurse Practitioner degree and where, as well as whether they have a financial need. Applicants should submit two letters of recommendation and the two most recent transcripts along with the application to support the RNs pursuit of a Nurse Practitioner degree.

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# Advancing Digital Equity Across the North Country Through ConnectALL Grant

Watertown – Fort Drum Regional Health Planning Organization (FDRHPO), in partnership with Adirondack Health Institute (AHI) and the North Country Digital Inclusion Coalition (NCIDC), is working to strengthen digital inclusion and digital equity across Northern New York through support from New York State’s ConnectALL Digital Equity Program Capacity Grant.

The initiative, known as North Country Connect-to-Tech (NC2T), is designed to help residents gain access to the internet, devices, technical support, and digital skills needed to

successfully navigate technology in today’s connected world. The project supports New York State’s broader digital equity strategy by investing in local organizations, partnerships, and community-based solutions that can sustainably expand digital opportunities for residents.

Digital equity means ensuring that all residents, especially those in rural, underserved, or historically marginalized communities, have the tools, connectivity, support, and skills they need to access education, employment, healthcare, government services, and community resources online.

Digital inclusion is the work that makes digital equity possible. It includes efforts to expand affordable, reliable internet access; improve access to computers and other connected devices; provide trusted technical assistance; and build digital literacy, privacy, and online safety skills.

About the North Country Digital Inclusion Coalition

AHI and FDRHPO established the North Country Digital Inclusion Coalition to bring together healthcare providers, telehealth specialists, community leaders, telecommunications experts, broadband advocates, library systems, and other partners

committed to closing the digital divide.

The Coalition builds on regional telehealth work by identifying barriers that healthcare providers and residents face when accessing digital services, especially in rural communities. Its work focuses on practical, sustainable strategies that make telehealth, online resources, and essential digital tools more accessible and affordable across the region.

The North Country Digital Inclusion Coalition works across seven Northern New York counties: Clinton, Essex, Franklin, Hamilton, Jefferson, Lewis, and

St. Lawrence.

The Coalition focuses on populations most affected by the digital divide, including low-income households, older adults, veterans, people with disabilities, rural residents, and formerly incarcerated individuals.

For these residents, limited access to reliable internet, digital devices, or technology support can create barriers to critical services, education, job opportunities, healthcare, and connection to their community.

Through the ConnectALL Grant, North Country Connect to Tech will strengthen the region’s digital equity ecosystem by supporting partnerships, expanding services, and helping residents build confidence using technology in everyday life.

The grant will support strategies that address digital literacy and skills, digital privacy and security, targeted accessibility, and collaborative approaches to reaching residents who face the greatest barriers to digital access. The Coalition will work to:

- Deploy digital navigators and trusted local support to help residents access online services and technology resources.

- Provide personalized digital literacy training, including support for telehealth, essential computer skills, software use,

See GRANT H7

ROCHESTER REGIONAL HEALTH

## Welcomes

**LaChelle Harper, WHNP-BC  
and Katelyn McKinley, FNP-C**

*Obstetrics and Gynecology*

LaChelle Harper and Katelyn McKinley are dedicated to providing comprehensive care to patients across their lifespan, including preventive care, such as screenings and exams; diagnosis and treatment for acute and chronic conditions; reproductive health counseling and family planning services; and support throughout pregnancy, postpartum, and menopause.

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FNP-C



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DIGITAL INCLUSION COALITION**

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Led by Adirondack Health Institute (AHI) and Fort Drum Regional Health Planning Organization (FDRHPO), in collaboration with the North Country Digital Inclusion Coalition.

WOM26-0338

# LaChelle Harper joins women's wellness team

POTSDAM —Rochester Regional Health's St. Lawrence Region is pleased to welcome Board Certified Women's Health Nurse Practitioner LaChelle Harper, WHNP-BC, MSN, RN, to its Women's Health team.

With more than 12 years of nursing experience across hospital and specialty care settings, Harper is known for her patient-centered approach, emphasizing empathetic listening, personalized care management, and patient education.

As a Women's Health Nurse Practitioner, Harper specializes in providing comprehensive care to patients across their lifespan, with a strong focus on reproductive, and gynecologic health. She will conduct preventive screenings such as Pap smears and breast exams. Additionally, she will diagnose and manage acute and chronic conditions, provide contraception counseling and family planning services, and support patients through pregnancy, postpartum care, and menopause. Harper will work in collaboration

with physicians and colleagues to ensure evidence-based care and education specific to disease prevention and health promotion are available.

Harper earned her Master of Science in Nursing with a focus in Women's Health from the University of Cincinnati, a Bachelor of Science in Nursing from the University of Southern Indiana, and an Associate of Science in Nursing from Illinois Eastern Community College. Her clinical training includes more than 700 hours in women's health, with experience in reproductive care, hormonal and thyroid screening, and menopaual management.

Harper is passionate about helping patients navigate the many transitions of their lives and is dedicated to improving access to high-quality, personalized care across the region. "I was drawn to the area because of the scenic beauty of St. Lawrence County," said Harper. "Its diversity, compassion, and strong sense of community inspired me to stay and raise my family."

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# RRH's St. Lawrence Region Honors DAISY Recipients



**Below L to R from Gouverneur Hospital) GH Associate Chief Operating Officer and Director of Behavioral Health South Heather Rich; SLR Vice President, Chief Nursing & Patient Care Officer Christina Latta; Award Recipient Melissa Breckenridge, RN; GH Inpatient Nurse Manager Carrie Foster; and SLR Associate, Chief Nursing Officer Amy Nugent.**

Four nurses across Rochester Regional Health's St. Lawrence Region (SLR) were recently named DAISY Award winners. The DAISY Award® is a special honor given to extraordinary nurses for the contributions they make every day going above and beyond expectations in science and sensitivity. Those receiving the Award were nominated by colleagues, providers, patients, and leaders for their actions, reputation, and professionalism.

Those honored this year were Melissa Breckenridge, RN; Meghan Carr, RN; Ashley St. Denis, RN; and Christine Wilson, RN. Awardees were recognized during personal celebrations that were held in May.

"These awards reflect the extraordinary compassion, professionalism, and dedication our nurses bring to patient care every day," said Rochester Regional Health's St. Lawrence Region President Donna McGregor. "Melissa, Meghan, Ashley, and Christine exemplify the very best of nursing through the meaningful connections they build with patients and

families, as well as the support they provide to their colleagues and communities. We are incredibly proud to recognize their outstanding contributions through the DAISY Award."

Breckenridge was nominated for the empathy, kindness, and reassurance she provided to a swing bed patient and her family during a difficult hospitalization. Her warm, supportive approach, willingness to answer questions with patience, and ability to motivate and comfort her patient left a lasting impact on the family during a challenging time.

Carr was nominated for the exceptional consideration and respect she showed while caring for a nonspeaking special needs patient during multiple Emergency Department visits. Through her kindness, attentiveness, and thoughtful efforts to make a stressful situation more comfortable, she provided meaningful support to both the patient and family.

St. Denis was nominated for her outstanding support, and hands-on care throughout a patient's labor

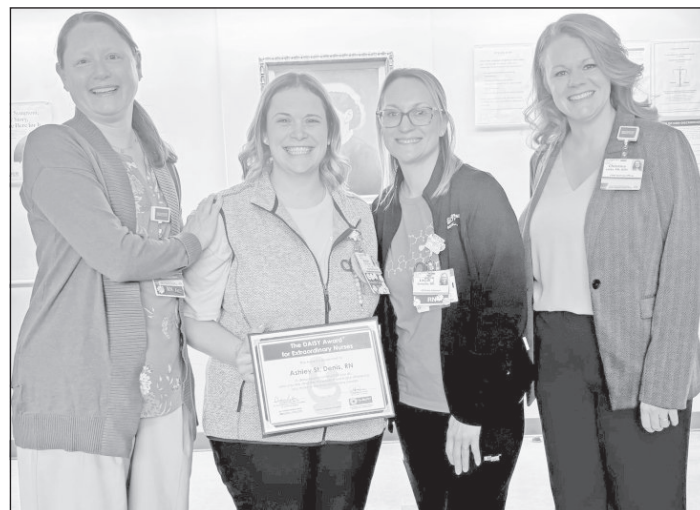
and delivery experience. Her calming presence, clinical knowledge, encouragement, and genuine empathy helped create a positive and reassuring environment for the patient and family during an important life moment.

Wilson was nominated in recognition of her exceptional clinical expertise, and unwavering commitment to patient-centered care. Through her empathy, professionalism, and dedication to excellence, she has earned the admiration of patients, families, and colleagues alike while serving as a respected role model across the healthcare team.

During each personal celebration, awardees were given a Daisy pin, certificate, and assorted gifts, along with a Healer's Touch sculpture. The beautiful sculpture is hand-carved by the Shona artists in Zimbabwe, and represents the bond between nurses and their patients.



**Below L to R from Massena Hospital) SLR Magnet Program Director Jolene Carotenuto; SLR Associate, Chief Nursing Officer Amy Nugent; MH Emergency Department Nurse Manager Peggy Truesdell; Award Recipient Meghan Carr, RN; MH Nursing Supervisor Michael Newtown; and MH Associate Chief Operating Officer and SLR Vice President of Business Development Brent Bishop.**



**(Below L to R from Canton-Potsdam Hospital) SLR Magnet Program Director Jolene Carotenuto; Award Recipient Ashley St. Denis, RN; CPH Obstetrics Nurse Educator Lindsey Sorrento; and SLR VP, Chief Nursing & Patient Care Officer Christina Latta.**



**(Below L to R from Clinical Network) SLR Senior Practice Administrator of Surgical Services Jesse Boula; SLR and CPH Chief Operating Officer Sinead Ingersoll; Award Recipient Christine Wilson, RN (accompanied by her daughter); RGH VP & Chief Nursing Officer Tiffany Smith; SLR Clinical Operations Director Rebecca Hall; and SLR Clinical Operations Assistant Director Kaitlyn Strader.**

# Samaritan's April 2026 DAISY® and BEE Award Recipients

Samaritan Medical Center is proud to announce its DAISY and BEE Award recipients for April 2026. The DAISY Award for Extraordinary Nurses® honors exceptional nursing staff, while the BEE Award recognizes other outstanding team members who demonstrate excellence every day, both at the hospital and in outpatient clinics.

Deserie Van Note, a Registered Nurse from the Float Pool at Samaritan Medical Center, was honored with the April DAISY Award. Nominated by a recent patient, Van Note was championed for her caring nature, quick response, and kind attention given during a difficult and painful time; helping the patient feel

comfortable and more at ease when things were uncertain.

The DAISY Award is an international award, backed by The DAISY Foundation. As a DAISY Award honoree, Van Note received a certificate of recognition, a DAISY Award pin, and the "A Healer's Touch" sculpture — hand-carved by artists of the Shona Tribe in Zimbabwe. A larger version of the sculpture has been installed in Samaritan's Healing Gardens to honor all current and future DAISY and BEE Award winners, funded by the Samaritan Auxiliary.

Elizabeth Deren, Nursing Assistant, Post-Anesthesia Care Unit, received the April BEE Award. Noted as a teammate every unit hopes for,



**April 2026 DAISY Award recipient Deserie Van Note, RN**



**April 2026 BEE Award recipient Elizabeth Deren, NA, PACU.**

Deren was nominated by a coworker for her ability to always think ahead, her dependability, and taking the time to prepare and organize before

patients arrive.

"Whether it's quickly setting up for an unexpected procedure such as a blood patch or epidural, she responds imme-

diately and with confidence," Deren's coworker said in her nomination. "Elizabeth is someone our anesthesia providers seek out by name because they trust her knowledge and efficiency when something is needed. That kind of trust is earned, and she demonstrates it consistently each day through her actions."

Deren received a certificate, a BEE Award pin, and a gift bag with tokens of appreciation.

These awards are presented year-round, and patients, families, and colleagues are encouraged to submit nominations at any time. To make a nomination or learn more about the DAISY and BEE Awards, visit [samaritanhealth.com/daisy-bee](http://samaritanhealth.com/daisy-bee).

## Kinney Drugs Raises \$62,859 for Children's Miracle Network of Northern New York

Kinney Drugs has partnered with Children's Miracle Network (CMN) since 1992, raising funds through their annual in-store campaign to support local children's hospitals across the region. Thanks to the generosity of customers in their local communities, 17 Kinney Drugs locations in Jefferson, Lewis and St. Lawrence counties raised an incredible \$62,859 for CMN at Samaritan.

These funds were donated at the register and collected through creative fundraising events, including trivia nights, bake sales, raffles and contests. With the support of the Kinney Drugs Foundation, locations were offered special incentives to reach ambitious fundraising goals. The campaign total increased 16% from 2025 to raise more than \$230,000 for six CMN hospitals.

Samaritan Medical Center is one of 170 Children's Miracle Network hospitals across North America, rais-



**Kinney Drugs store teams attend a pre-campaign meeting at Samaritan Medical Center.**

ing and allocating funds to improve the health and well-being of children in our local community. Every donation stays local to support child-centered areas of Samaritan and provide financial assistance to families in Jefferson, Lewis and St. Lawrence counties with a child facing a health crisis.

"Year after year, Kinney Drugs demonstrates their dedication to improving kids' health in local communities," said Angie Van-Wormer, Director of Children's Miracle Network at Samaritan Medical Center. "With their support, we are able to help even more children and families when they need it most."

Through their partnership with CMN, Kinney Drugs and the Kinney Drugs Foundation are helping to make big change for all kids.

For more information on Children's Miracle Network Hospitals contact Samaritan Medical Center at 315-785-4053 or [cmninfo@shsny.com](mailto:cmninfo@shsny.com).

## Grant

From H4

and everyday online tasks.

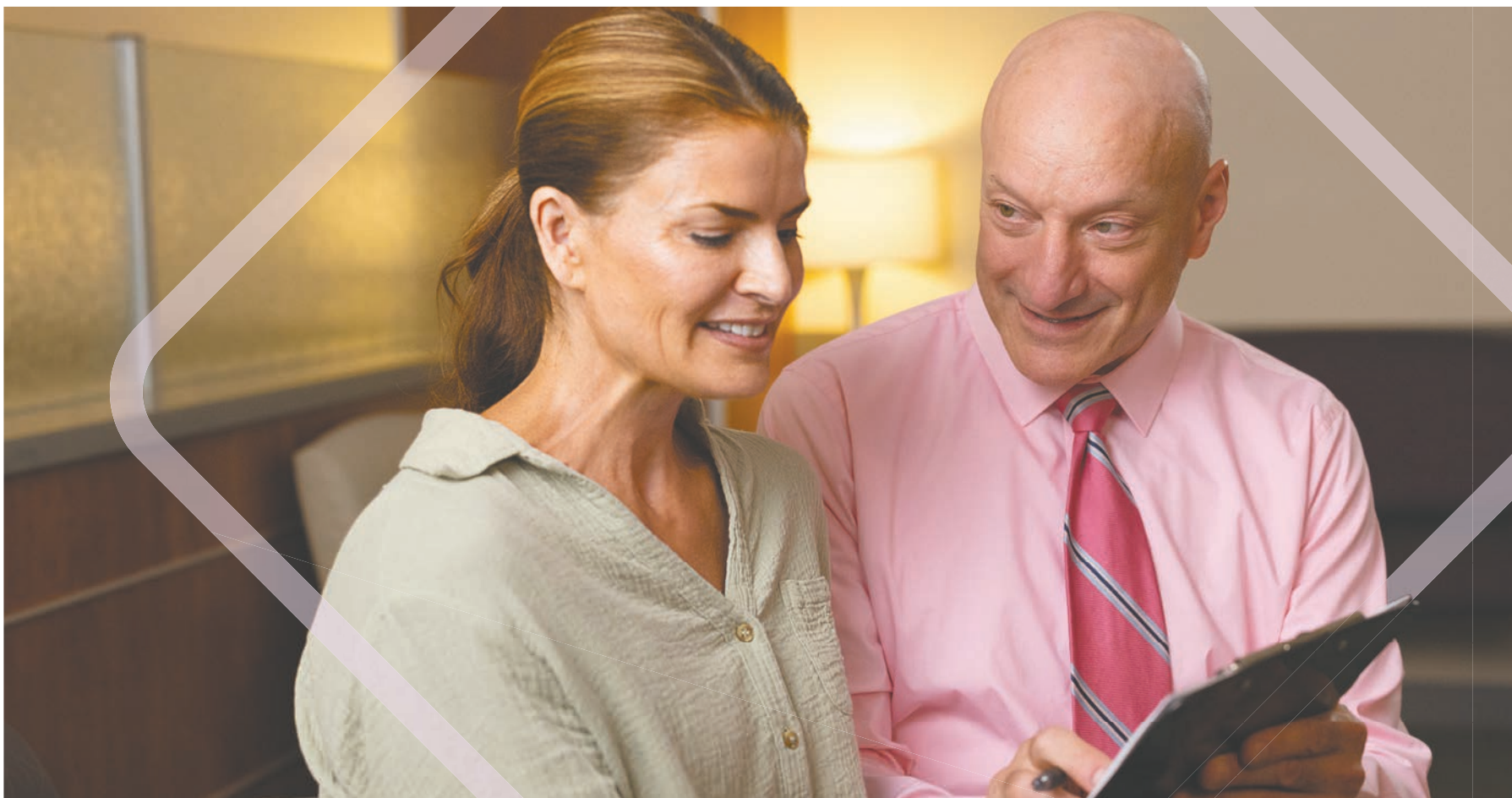
Increase awareness of affordable connectivity options, devices, and regional digital inclusion resources.

Strengthen collaboration among healthcare, community, education, broadband, and library partners to create sustainable digital equity solutions across the North Country.

New York State's ConnectALL Office has identified digital equity as a key strategy for improving access to digital literacy, job readiness, affordable internet and devices, digital privacy and safety, and accessible government services.

"Digital access is no longer optional," said Pat Fontana, Deputy Director at FDRHPO. "It is essential for health, education, employment, and connection. Through North Country Connect to Tech, we are working with partners across the region to ensure residents have the connectivity, devices, skills, and support they need to thrive."

For more information, [www.fdrhpo.org/ncdic](http://www.fdrhpo.org/ncdic).

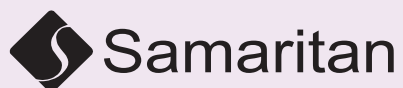


# Leading local breast care.

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