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Groundbreaking Set for Donna M. Christian Christensen Health Center on St. Croix

The VI Dept. of Health will break ground Dec. 16 on the Donna M. Christian Christensen, Health Center at Estate Richmond, replacing the former Charles Harwood complex with a resilient, consolidated public health campus supported by federal recovery funds.

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Rendering of a portion of the Donna M. Christian Christensen Health Center. By. VIDOH.

The V.I. Department of Health is preparing to formally launch construction of a long-awaited public health facility on St. Croix, with a groundbreaking ceremony scheduled for 9 a.m. on Tuesday, December 16, at Estate Richmond. The project marks the start of construction on the Donna M. Christian Christensen, MD, Health Center, which will replace the former Charles

Harwood Memorial Complex.

Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion described the ceremony as a milestone in the territory's recovery and rebuilding efforts following the destruction caused by Hurricanes Irma and Maria in 2017. "This ceremony represents a significant milestone in the Territory's long-term recovery efforts following the devastation of Hurricanes Irma and Maria and in the rebuilding of our public health infrastructure," Encarnacion said. "It signals a new era of modern and community-centered public health services on St. Croix."

The former Charles Harwood Memorial Complex sustained catastrophic hurricane damage and was later deemed beyond repair by the Federal Emergency Management Agency. In 2022, federal funding was obligated for the full demolition and replacement of the facility. Demolition took place in phased operations between 2023 and 2024, clearing the way for construction of the new health center.

Construction of the new facility is being led by the Consigli/Benton Joint Venture, a partnership combining national construction expertise with local experience. James Benton, principal-in-charge of the joint venture, emphasized the importance of the project to the community. "This facility is a lifeline for community health and wellness, and we are committed to building a state-of-the-art facility that the people of this Territory deserve," Benton said. "Our team is proud to help bring this vision to life and to once again deliver another quality facility for the Virgin Islands Department of Health."

J. Benton Construction previously completed another major Department of Health project in 2023, finishing the rebuild of the department's Women, Infant and Children (WIC) Building on St. Thomas.

Design of the new health center has been shaped through years of collaboration between the Department of Health's leadership and Flad Architects, the project's design partner. The design emphasizes resilience, functionality, and integration with the surrounding community. "The goal is to honor the culture and blend in cutting-edge technology to create an inspiring, forward-thinking public health facility for the Territory and community," said Steve Jackson, principal at Flad Architects and lead designer of the project.

Design refinement and planning are continuing under Flad Architects in partnership with the Department of Health and the Virgin Islands Office of Disaster Recovery. The project is being delivered through federal recovery funding and in close coordination with ODR and key federal partners.

The new Donna M. Christian Christensen, MD, Health Center is intended to consolidate the Department of Health's programs into a single, modern campus built to withstand future storms and support expanded public health services. Planned features include dedicated behavioral health spaces, a healthy-living demonstration kitchen, outdoor patio areas, and a conference and training center.

The facility is named in honor of Dr. Donna M. Christian Christensen, a Virgin Islands physician and the first woman to serve as the U.S. Virgin Islands Delegate to Congress. Commissioner Encarnacion noted the personal significance of the project. "This moment is deeply meaningful — both personally and professionally," she said. "The Charles Harwood campus shaped my early journey in healthcare. We are honoring that history while taking a decisive step toward a stronger public health future for the people of the Virgin Islands."

Completion of the Donna M. Christian Christensen, MD, Health Center is projected for 2028.

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