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News Release

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Saskatchewan

Health

HEALTH BUDGET ADDRESSES PRIORITIES

The Government of Saskatchewan has introduced a \$4.202 billion health budget that provides strategic investments to improve the health of Saskatchewan people, while also recognizing that more efficiencies in the health sector are possible. This is an increase of \$126.9 million or 3.1 per cent from the previous fiscal year, reflecting the government's commitment to health care.

The Ministry of Health budget includes a \$10.5 million investment toward transforming the surgical experience for Saskatchewan residents and ensuring that in four years no one waits more than three months for their surgery. A further investment of \$7 million will create a new Patient First Initiatives Fund to support the adoption of a patient and family-centred approach in the health system.

"We are committed to ensuring that Saskatchewan patients come first, and that they receive surgery in a timely and fair manner," Health Minister Don McMorris said. "The Government of Saskatchewan, health care workers and other partners are focusing on surgical care as their top-priority response to the findings of the independent Patient First Review."

The 2010-11 Budget continues significant investments in recruiting and retaining physicians, including \$3.5 million for a physician recruitment strategy and the establishment of the Physician Recruitment Agency. An investment of \$6.6 million will be provided to continue medical education system enhancements including physician training seat expansion, with 12 new post-graduate seats. This fulfills government's commitment to fund 120 residency seats. The budget also provides a significant increase to the Saskatchewan Cancer Agency for cancer drugs and services.

Investments have also been made to ensure vulnerable people get the care they need. This includes:

- \$2.5 million in new funding to enhance autism services;
- \$2.6 million in new funding to increase cardiac care capacity including expansion of electrophysiology services in the province;
- \$3.8 million operating funding increase for the Irene and Leslie Dubé Centre for Mental Health;
- \$3.6 million in new funding for kidney disease and hemodialysis volume increases; and
- \$2.4 million in new funding to continue infant, pre-school vaccinations and seasonal influenza immunization.

The largest portion of the government's investment in health – 74 per cent of the 2010-11 budget – goes toward paying health care workers.

Funding priority health programs and services required some tough decisions.

Regional health authorities and the Saskatchewan Cancer Agency have been asked to find \$35 million in administrative savings and to reduce costs and improve efficiencies through increased use of shared services and bulk purchasing. These savings will also be realized through targets to reduce their operating costs through lost time due to injuries, "premium" pay and reduced employee sick time. As a result, RHAs, which provide most of the health services in Saskatchewan, will receive \$2.6 billion, an increase of \$123 million or 5 per cent over the last fiscal year. Capital funding provided in previous years will allow progress to continue for the Children's Hospital, the Surgical Care Centre and long-term care facilities.

Saskatchewan is joining virtually all other Canadian provinces in limiting coverage for chiropractic services. Effective April 1, low-income individuals receiving Supplementary or Family Health Benefits, or on the Senior's Income Plan will be eligible for a maximum of 12 treatments a year. All other coverage has been eliminated. The reduction in the universal program allows the government to reinvest \$10.4 million in priority health programs and services.

As well, given the province's strong economy, competitive wages, and success in meeting and exceeding recruitment and retention targets, the ministry is scaling back some of the financial non-physician recruitment and retention incentives in the health sector.

The 2010-11 Budget supports Saskatchewan's tobacco control strategy to help reduce the negative effects of tobacco on Saskatchewan people. The Minister of Health highlighted the government's decision to increase the Tobacco Tax rate and reduce the tax-free allowance for a First Nations individual to one carton per week from three cartons. This change will help reduce the negative impacts of tobacco use on reserve and deter tobacco consumption within Saskatchewan's First Nations population, which has higher smoking rates than society at large. It will also reduce the potential for tax-free tobacco to find its way into the hands of non-First Nation individuals.

Smoking and second hand smoke are major contributing factors to a number of chronic diseases and deaths. Tobacco use is the leading cause of preventable illness, disability and premature death in Canada.

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