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Social Services

## **GOVERNMENT INVESTS IN HOUSING, CHILDREN AND FAMILIES**

Social Services will continue to make significant investments on behalf of Saskatchewan people in need with commitments to affordable housing and child and family services.

The government announced today a new program called "Headstart on a Home" to help eligible families own a home.

"Available, affordable housing is key to building better lives for Saskatchewan people and developing strong, stable communities throughout our province," Social Services Minister Donna Harpauer said. "The 'Headstart on a Home' program will help families in need realize their dream of owning their own home."

This new program is expected to create a minimum of 1,000 new affordable homeownership opportunities for eligible lower- to moderate-income homebuyers over the next five years. The Board of Directors of the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation has been tasked with determining the parameters of this initiative and will be announcing additional details over the next few months.

"I also want to stress that improving the lives of children in care remains a priority for our government and we will continue the work we have already begun to strengthen our child welfare system," Harpauer said.

Social Services' 2010-11 budget includes funding to support a comprehensive multi-year strategy by providing:

- \$8.2 million to fully fund the operating costs associated with developing residential spaces;
- \$4.5 million to develop additional out-of-home residential spaces;
- a 1.5 per cent cost-of-living increase to foster parents and other caregivers;
- \$1.6 million to enhance respite options for foster parents;
- an additional \$1.1 million to enhance intensive family support services;
- annualized funding of \$1.3 million to support Family Finders, a program in partnership with First Nations Agencies to place children with extended family; and
- \$9 million to address pressures in family-based care.

The ministry will also continue to provide funding of \$9 million to lead toward a new automated case management system.

Significant investments by the government over the past two years in child and family services have helped support the province's child welfare system, as demonstrated through the development of 144 new residential spaces across Saskatchewan, as well as by a 36 per cent decrease in the number of children living in foster homes with more than four children.

The budget also includes \$1.5 million to continue working toward the government's four-year goal of eliminating the 440-person waitlist for individuals with intellectual disabilities. To date, 264 spaces have been created – 60 per cent of the goal.

The ministry is also receiving \$30.2 million to offset caseload and cost increases in the Saskatchewan Assistance Program, the Saskatchewan Assured Income for Disability Program and the Transitional Employment Allowance, as part of government's resolve to maintain core services while ensuring fiscal responsibility.

The Government of Saskatchewan is committed to ensuring the best use of public funds while helping citizens build better lives for themselves through economic independence, strong families and active involvement in the labour market and the community.

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