

Legislative Statement for Honourable Elvy Robichaud, Minister of Health and Wellness - Main Estimates - Department of Health and Wellness, Year 2003-2004, Wednesday, April 2, 2003.

Mr. Speaker, it is with pride that I rise today to underline the highlights of the 2003-2004 spending estimates for my department.

Over the next fiscal year, my department will invest approximately \$120 million more in health care for New Brunswickers than last year. This includes an additional \$58.4 million set out in the 2003-2004 Budget estimates which was tabled yesterday, plus an additional \$60 million in new federal funding flowing from the First Ministers arrangement on health care renewal agreed to in February.

Mr. Speaker, the budget for the Department of Health and Wellness in ordinary expenditures for 2003-2004 is \$1,487.1 million. This represents a 4.1% increase, or approximately \$58.4 million increase in provincial funding, over the 2002-2003 budget of \$1,428.7 million.

The budget for Hospital Services will be \$853.8 million, an increase of approximately \$24.1 million over 2002-2003.

The total budget for Medicare will be \$327.3 million, an increase of \$17.4 million of which \$14.7 million has been allocated to the program to cover the 5.5% increase approved for Fee For Service physicians, the second increase in a three year contract.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday, I also announced that we are adding Remicade and Enbrel to our Prescription Drug Program to ensure access for those New Brunswickers who can least afford the cost.

As well, Mr. Speaker, our government will invest \$2.8 million to support initiatives for children with autism.

The total capital budget for my department for the same period is \$24.0 million, a 107% increase, or approximately \$12.4 million, over the 2002-2003 budget of \$11.6 million.

Mr. Speaker, \$5.6 million will be allocated to complete the design and construct the foundations and structure for the integration of the Stan Cassidy Centre to the Dr. Everett Chalmers Regional Hospital site and the expansion of the Chalmers facility for a new Regional Laboratory. A teaching theatre will also be included which will be funded by the Chalmers Auxiliary. This rehabilitation centre will benefit New Brunswickers from across the province, in the language of their choice.

Funding of \$1.5 million will be provided for the architectural design of a major construction project at the Moncton Hospital. The project will consist of a new standalone building to be constructed on the grounds of the adjacent Beauséjour Middle School. The new building will house the consolidation of all Ambulatory Care Services and a new Laboratory. In addition, services that are presently offered offsite such as breast cancer screening and bone densitometry clinics will be relocated to the new building.

A total of \$4.4 million will be allocated to general capital improvements in hospitals. These projects relate to replacement and upgrading of building envelope components (roofs, windows, etc.) and the replacement and upgrading of various building systems (ventilation, air-conditioning, medical gases, emergency power supply, etc.). It also includes various small renovation projects to implement new or enhanced services and programs.

In October 2002, Government announced that the first Community Health Centres (CHCs) will be established in four communities - at St. Joseph's Hospital in Saint John, and in Lamèque,

Doaktown and Minto. A total of \$7.5 million will be invested during the fiscal year 2003-2004 to implement Community Health Centres (CHCs).

Finally, an instalment of \$5.0 million will be allocated for capital equipment replacement in hospitals.

Mr. Speaker, the additional \$60 million will be allocated on the basis of three specific areas: \$24 million more as part of a new Health Reform Fund, \$12 million more for a Diagnostic/Medical Equipment Fund, and an additional \$24 million under the Canada Health and Social Transfer for existing health care services. Following finalized negotiations with the federal government, we will return to the Legislature to provide further details on these expenditures

Specific expenditures will focus on the following priorities:

1. Health Reform Fund: The department will invest in primary health care reform, community health centres, and collaborative health practices including hiring more nurse practitioners to improve access to care. It will also spend more on home care and improve the prescription drug coverage for seniors and low-income New Brunswickers with a particular focus on catastrophic drugs. We will also develop and implement a provincial cancer strategy.
2. Diagnostic/Medical Equipment Fund: We will spend more on purchasing and replacing anesthesia units, gamma cameras, and ultrasound units.
3. Additional CHST funding: The department will continue to invest more in hospital and Medicare services to provide needed health care for people.

On the health human resources front, Mr. Speaker, from June 1999 until March, 2003, there has been a net increase of 90 physicians in the Province. The department has recruited 13 family practitioners and 20 specialists who will establish a practice in New Brunswick within the next four to five months. The total of recruited physicians is a record 123.

In the 2002-2003 fiscal year, the department implemented phase two of its \$8.1 million nursing resource strategy. The strategy was designed to increase the number of nurses in New Brunswick, to keep nurses in the province and to improve work force planning. In December 2002, there were 4,461 full-time permanent nurses in New Brunswick.

The department has allocated an additional \$0.5 million for year three of the strategy. This will increase funding for the bursary program for student nurses and nursing assistants and the renewal of orientation programs for new nursing staff.

Thank you Mr. Speaker.
