

**LEGISLATIVE STATEMENT FOR HONOURABLE ELVY ROBICHAUD
MINISTER OF HEALTH AND WELLNESS
MAIN ESTIMATES FOR 2004-2005
JUNE 9, 2004**

“Healthy Futures: Securing New Brunswick’s Health Care System”

I am pleased to unveil my department’s budget estimates for the 2004-2005 fiscal year. As promised, it is also my pleasure to present the Provincial Health Plan. It is entitled “Healthy Futures: Securing New Brunswick’s Health Care System” and sets out the framework for implementing our vision of a truly patient-focused and community-based health care.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to draw attention to the Minister of Finance’s budget for the 2004-2005 fiscal year. Health care is the top priority of New Brunswickers. I was therefore pleased to learn that the budget will see a record level of investment in health and senior care totalling **2.06 billion dollars**. This represents an increase of 8.9 per cent, or approximately 169 million dollars, from the 2003-2004 main estimates. This includes health-related spending, both ordinary and capital, in the departments of Health and Wellness and Family and Community Services.

We will continue to invest in priority initiatives, including the renewal and reform of our health care system. In order to secure our province’s health care system, we will streamline growth in program areas and realize administrative savings. This will result in more resources at the bedside and for front-line service, and less on administration.

Mr. Speaker, when we plan for the future of New Brunswick’s health system, we need to make choices. These choices are instrumental to improve health services, designed to meet the health care needs of New Brunswickers for today and for tomorrow.

Our government remains committed to providing New Brunswickers with a full range of health care services that are efficient, effective and affordable over the long term.

Health care is the top priority of New Brunswickers. They want access to quality health care when they need it. They want to know that our health care system will be there for them when they need it.

Consultation has been a vital component in the development of our Provincial Health Plan "*Healthy Futures*". I have met with board chairs and CEOs of all RHAs and representatives of the New Brunswick Medical Society and the New Brunswick Nurses Association to discuss the plan.

Mr. Speaker, we will expand on the current network of Community Health Centres and we will develop other networks to ensure continuity of patient care. By this, I mean we will ensure that all New Brunswickers have 24/7 access to primary health care services wherever they live in the province. We also intend to establish a surgical access management program.

To meet our targets, and deliver a range of quality services in the wide spectrum of health care services, we will all have to change the way we do business.

We recognize that money alone will not solve our health care challenges. Changes are greatly required in order to secure our health care system to ensure healthy futures.

Mr. Speaker, our Provincial Health Plan "*Healthy Futures*" sets out a framework for meaningful, enduring change that will sustain our province's health system. To achieve this vision, we will have to make difficult choices. But we do so in the knowledge that in making difficult choices today, New Brunswickers will continue to have the high-quality, efficient and safe health care they expect and deserve. As Minister of Health and Wellness, I can accept no less.

Main Estimates

Mr. Speaker,

- We will make large investments in important areas such as implementing the cancer strategy, introducing paramedic training for New Brunswick's ambulance attendants and consolidating ambulance services;
- We will provide more immunization for children and youth; and
- We will invest 500,000 dollars to promote wellness, reduce obesity and encourage physical activity among our young people.

Mr. Speaker, the budget for the Department of Health and Wellness in ordinary expenditures for 2004-2005 is 1,609.7 million dollars.

Hospital Services

The Hospital Services Branch is responsible for planning, standard setting, monitoring and funding New Brunswick's hospital system according to the Provincial Health Plan.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to say that the budget for Hospital Services will be 907.9 million dollars, an increase of approximately 62.8 million dollars over 2003-2004.

This additional funding will provide financial relief to Regional Health Authorities with respect to their current deficits. We will work in collaboration with the hospital system in identifying, and managing the pressure points that may present due to technological advances and increasing population needs.

Furthermore Mr. Speaker, we intend to establish a surgical access management program that will ensure all surgical services are being used efficiently and that surgery wait lists are appropriately managed. This will require the development of a province-wide surgery registry, standardized priority criteria and referral guidelines for family physicians.

Wellness

Our government is committed to the well-being of New Brunswickers by promoting self-sufficiency and personal responsibility, and providing approved services as required.

Today, 40 per cent of New Brunswickers are overweight and more than half the population is physically inactive. The majority of us have poor nutritional habits. While tobacco use has declined in recent years, too many New Brunswickers continue to smoke. The result of these choices has been an explosion in cancers, lung disease, heart disease, diabetes – all related to the way we live. Half of all deaths in Canada today are attributable to lifestyle choices.

Mr. Speaker, our government is investing 500,000 dollars to implement a Wellness Strategy.

Over the next ten years we will work to reduce the percentages of New Brunswickers who are physically inactive, who are overweight, who smoke, and who are at risk of depression.

New Provincial Cancer Care Network

Mr. Speaker, New Brunswick has the second-highest rate of cancer in Canada, and the incidence of cancers in this province is growing.

We have approximately 3,900 new cases of cancer (11 per day) diagnosed each year, and more than 20,000 New Brunswickers are living with cancer today.

I am pleased to announce we are investing 2.5 million dollars in the New Brunswick Cancer Care Network.

This new network will unify, manage and coordinate a broad based system for cancer control in the province. It is designed to reduce the incidence of cancer and improve the quality of life of New Brunswickers living with cancer.

Simply put, Mr. Speaker, by organizing our current systems of cancer control we will assure consistency as well as determining causes and addressing prevention.

It has been estimated that the cancer burden as measured by mortality could be reduced by as much as 10 per cent if such a strategy is pursued.

Immunization

Mr. Speaker, we will invest 1.7 million dollars this year and an additional 1.85 million dollars next year to expand our immunization coverage to include four new publicly funded vaccines for our children and youth.

The introduction of these four new vaccines over the next two years will put New Brunswick on equal footing with the rest of Canada. Wellness and preventive health measures such as immunization are important to prevent sickness and disease in the first place.

I am pleased to say that over 40, 000 children and adolescents in our province will be able to benefit from these preventive vaccines against chicken pox, whooping cough, meningitis, and pneumonia.

Cardiac Care Program

Mr. Speaker, the Provincial Health Plan "*Healthy Futures*" will put New Brunswick's Cardiac Care Program, offered by the Saint John Regional Hospital, on a firm foundation.

Dialysis Units

Mr. Speaker, over the past three years, the number of hemodialysis patients in New Brunswick has increased on average between 9 and 10 per cent a year. The incidence of diabetes is also increasing. Given that diabetes accounts for 30 per cent of all new dialysis patients, and that the incidence of diabetes is increasing with an aging population, the need for dialysis services is expected to grow.

For this reason, the number of satellite units providing dialysis will be expanded, when clinically sustainable, to include Sussex, the Upper Saint John River Valley, Campbellton, Tracadie and to other regions of the province as appropriate.

Methadone Program

Mr. Speaker, several New Brunswick communities have identified the need for a methadone maintenance service to assist residents of their communities with drug addictions. Our government is responding by developing an organized methadone maintenance service targeted at opiate addicts. This service will reflect evidence-based "best practices" that include administering, monitoring compliance, counselling and long-term follow-up and be phased-in around the province.

Ambulance Services

The role of our province's ambulance service is to give high quality pre-hospital care to people throughout New Brunswick. Each year more than 1,130 professional ambulance personnel provide between 60,000 and 65,000 services to New Brunswickers. These services include air, land and dispatch operations.

Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned earlier, to ensure that the high quality of these services continues, my department is increasing the budget of this service. We are injecting an additional 4 million dollars. The total budget will be 41.9 million dollars which will cover the cost of enhancing our ambulance services offered across the province.

Changes will include better coordination and more effective contract management, higher standards of training for ambulance attendants and consolidated dispatch services.

This enhanced ambulance service will continue to be held to the same high standard of response times: to an urban location within nine minutes, and to a rural location within 25 minutes, 90 per cent of the time.

Prescription Drug Program

New Brunswick's Prescription Drug Program offers assistance to those in the greatest need. Mr. Speaker, to ensure New Brunswickers can afford the often high cost of prescription drugs, I am pleased to announced that we've injected an additional 17.5 million dollars in the program for a total budget of 132 million dollars.

Our government will establish a Catastrophic Drug Program from savings realized through the course of the Provincial Health Plan.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to point out two components which drive up the cost of prescription drugs: volume and price. The increase in price comes as the result of the introduction of more expensive drugs on the market, while the increase in volume comes from the fact that even though there are fewer beneficiaries, these same beneficiaries are using more drugs. We will continue to work with the Government of Canada and other jurisdictions to develop a national solution to the national problem of catastrophic drug costs.

Capital Improvements and Equipment

I am pleased to say that we will invest a total of 53.7 million dollars in capital improvements and equipment over the 2004-2005 fiscal year. This includes 18.8 million dollars in capital construction, 16.8 in Health Care Renewal, 13.7 million dollars in capital equipment and 4.4 million dollars in capital improvements.

These projects include a new 70-bed hospital in the Upper River Valley, a new building for the Stan Cassidy Center for Rehabilitation, renovations at the Moncton Hospital Ambulatory Care Unit, and a new Addictions Services Center in Campbellton.

Mr. Speaker, we face many challenges with respect to the improvement of buildings and the updating of hospital equipment. We are meeting those needs as quickly and as fairly as we can. Every year capital dollars are dedicated to purchase high technology equipment for the hospital sector. I am therefore pleased to announce we will invest \$36 million in equipment over the next three years to address our priorities, including the \$13.7 million for the 2004-2005 fiscal as I have just mentioned.

These investments in capital improvements and equipment will help us complete, continue and advance a number of very important projects to improving access to primary health care.

Health Professionals

Mr. Speaker, our government is successful in recruiting and retaining health professionals by working closely with our partners. We have more doctors and more fulltime nurses than ever before. However there are still challenges.

In order to provide better access to care and services, our government will invest more to recruit and retain physicians, nurses, nurse practitioners, and other health care professionals. We will continue to support medical education. We will build on the work done in the past and ensure New Brunswickers have access to health professionals and their services now and in the future.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to announce that we will add 70 new doctors and 40 new nurse practitioners as well as 95 new nursing seats over a four year period.

Medicare

I am pleased to say that the total budget for Medicare will be increased by 49.1 million dollars for a total of 376.4 million dollars.

Health Research

Providing the best health services requires health research. The Department of Health and Wellness will partner with the New Brunswick Innovation Foundation and other stakeholders to build health research capacity, foster innovation and promote evidence-based decision-making. I am pleased to announce that we will invest \$3 million in health research.

Conclusion

Mr. Speaker, these are just a few initiatives my department will be taking this fiscal year to renew health care for New Brunswickers. When added to our government's accomplishments in previous years, these activities are helping us reach our goal of creating a single, integrated provincial health care system that is patient-focused and community-based, providing health services in the official language of choice at a cost New Brunswickers can afford.

My department will continue to secure our health care system and implement changes needed to deliver services that will meet the present and future health needs of New Brunswickers.

Mr. Speaker, as Minister of Health and Wellness I am very proud of the accomplishments and progress we have made so far in regard to health care. I am equally proud of the choices we are making which will lead us to a renewed health care system and a new way of delivering health services.

Implementing this strategy outlined in the Provincial Health Plan "*Healthy Futures*" will require hard choices. But these decisions must be made. The choice we face in health care today is not between "change" and "no change", but between choosing to be prepared for change and allowing change to overwhelm us.

There have been a lot of rumours in the past few months -- rumours that have caused many New Brunswick communities to fear the worst for their hospitals and the health and well-being of their residents.

In this plan, we will set out the choices we have made to ensure that New Brunswick's health system can be sustained and maintained. We can have a viable, sustainable health system that is clinically safe and financially affordable, for the long term. But the time for action is now.

In closing, I would like to thank staff of my department for the effort they have put into this budget, the preparation of the Provincial Health Plan, and for their commitment to providing quality services for the people of New Brunswick.

As promised to the people of New Brunswick, I am pleased this morning to table the Provincial Health Plan "*Healthy Futures*" which will be the blue print for the health care of the future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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