



Initiatives to address wait times

Taking steps to address critical concerns

In addition to the federal wait-times funding of \$18 million in 2005–2006, the province will invest millions of dollars to address the specific pressures being felt on health services in ways that will ultimately improve access for patients. The Health Minister recently announced \$2 million in new money to be spent to help implement mental health standards across the province in the district health authorities and the IWK. These dollars will put more services in community mental health clinics to provide care as close to home as possible.

Another \$1.65 million will add 50 additional restorative care beds in the province to alleviate some of the pressures hospitals are experiencing. This is one solution that supports people who require alternative levels of care.

Some of the other funding initiatives underway include the following:

- In April 2005, 25 orthopedic beds at Capital Health will open; in 2005–2006 government will spend \$6.7 million, an increase of \$2.3 million, to operate the unit/expansion, which should prevent the wait list for orthopedic surgery from growing any further.
- A new investment of \$300,000 will be dedicated to a thorough review and analysis of existing pain management programs, which will include an assessment of wait times for patients experiencing chronic pain.
- In response to growing pressures on services in the Annapolis Valley, the Valley Regional Hospital will undergo a 21-bed expansion, as well as a renovation to its emergency room; the Department of Health will invest \$3 million in the first phase of this project.

- The province is investing \$275,000 to commence the planning for the Sound Start Program through Nova Scotia Hearing and Speech. This initial investment will improve access for preschool children in five areas of the province with the highest identified wait list; full implementation will occur in 2006/07.

The Department of Health has committed \$1.5 million to open 25 additional nursing home beds in Cape Breton this year. We will also open 100 transition care, respite care and level II nursing home beds in the district to help alleviate pressures on the system and ensure seniors receive the kind of care they need as close to their homes as possible.

The district health authority in New Glasgow will also receive additional funding this year to continue expanding its orthopedic program, which will help improve access there. This will help cover costs of a new surgeon, support staff and more operating room time.

The number of publicly funded magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) machines in Nova Scotia will double with the addition of six new MRI's—four additional machines and two replacements for older units. This means that Nova Scotia will have one MRI scanner to 117,500 people—the best ratio in Canada.

Capital Health's fifth linear accelerator is now up and running thanks to the federal medical equipment fund. As of February 2005, 30 more patients per day can be treated with radiation therapy, now that the new accelerator and simulator are in place. This brings down the overall wait time, from the time a doctor decides to treat a patient with radiotherapy to actual treatment, by an average of one week. Before the installation of the new accelerator, average wait times were four to five weeks.

Three mammography units for the Nova Scotia Breast Screening program are to be replaced. The addition of these units will ensure women in Nova Scotia get faster and more precise breast screening and diagnostic tests.

As part of its long-term strategy to better understand the issue of wait times, government has welcomed members of the public and health-care professionals to its newly established Wait Times Advisory Committee. The committee will help identify wait-time pressure points throughout the system and make specific recommendations to the Minister of Health on ways to reduce long waits. Later this year, for the first time, Nova Scotians will have access to province-wide data on wait times in diagnostic services, through the Department of Health website.

Together, these initiatives are further steps in government's plan to improve access to health services.

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