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MCGUINTY GOVERNMENT IMPROVING HEALTH OF YOUNG PEOPLE WITH DIABETES

Ontario The First Province To Fully Fund Insulin Pumps For Children

TORONTO – The McGuinty government is improving the health and quality of life of children and youth with type 1 diabetes by providing insulin pumps and related supplies, Health and Long-Term Care Minister George Smitherman announced today.

“Diabetes is a serious chronic disease that can lead to long-term debilitating complications if not managed effectively through a daily regimen, which can often be a challenge for children and youth,” Smitherman said. “By providing young people affected by type 1 diabetes with insulin pumps and other supplies, the McGuinty government is helping them better manage this disease and lead active, healthy lives.”

Today’s \$9.65 million investment means the province will cover the full cost of insulin pumps and ongoing related supplies to benefit about 1,000 children aged 18 and under, retroactive to April 1, 2006. This initiative will be accessed through the ministry’s assistive devices program, which provides financial support to Ontario residents with long-term physical disabilities or health conditions.

Children will receive training on how to use an insulin pump at one of the 34 specialized pediatric diabetes programs located across the province and administered by the Network of Ontario Pediatric Diabetes Programs.

The government’s announcement today follows steps taken by Michael Gravelle, MPP for Thunder Bay-Superior North, who introduced a bill in October, 2005 to provide greater access to insulin pumps. “By providing children and youth with insulin pumps and related supplies, we will be improving their day-to-day life,” said Gravelle. “The impact for these young people will be nothing short of dramatic.”

“We’re pleased the government has followed through on its commitment to fund insulin pumps for young people in Ontario,” said Gary O’Connor, Executive Director, Ontario, and Canadian Diabetes Association. “Improved access to insulin pumps will help many young people with the daily regimen of managing diabetes and reduce the risk of fatal complications.”

Diabetes is a chronic condition resulting from the body’s inability to sufficiently produce and/or properly use insulin, which assists with the conversion of glucose into energy. Without insulin, glucose cannot be sufficiently absorbed from the bloodstream into the cells of the body. Chronic high levels of blood glucose due to diabetes can lead to long-term damage, dysfunction and failure of the kidneys, eyes, nerves, heart and blood vessels. Children are most at risk of developing serious complications of type 1 diabetes such as kidney disease, coronary disease and hypertension.

"I am pleased to be part of a government that is taking action to improve the quality of life of the thousands of Ontarians that suffer from diabetes," said Minister of Health Promotion Jim Watson. "By working together, we can encourage Ontarians to live healthier, longer and more active lives."

"I would like to take this opportunity to thank Minister Smitherman and the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care for making this day a reality," said Terry Anne Thomson, Coordinator with the Ontario Diabetes Action Partnership. "This is a wonderful day for all those children with type 1 diabetes who need an insulin pump and supplies."

Today's announcement is part of the McGuinty government \$53 million diabetes strategy that focuses on diabetes education, early intervention and effective prevention of complications.

Last month, the government also announced other initiatives to improve the quality of life for people living with diabetes, which included:

- Adding the new drug, Actos, to the province's list of medicines that will be covered by the Ontario Drug Benefit Program under Bill 102's new conditional listing mechanism
- Providing \$18.1 million to create 76 new and enhanced community diabetes education programs.

Today's initiative is part of the McGuinty government's plan for innovation in public health care, building a system that delivers on three priorities - keeping Ontarians healthy, reducing wait times and providing better access to doctors and nurses.

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