

**Michael Smith Foundation for Health Research  
Health Minister George Abbott  
Thursday, April 20, 2006**

*Check against delivery*

Thank you Dr Aubrey Tingle. It is a pleasure to be here today.

Five years ago, government and the province's top researchers talked about a vision for British Columbia to assume a leadership role in health research. This vision encouraged the best and brightest to make our province the place where their talents could make a difference.

That was the start of a major change in the way we approach health research and innovation in biomedical, clinical, population health and health services research in our province. In short, the last five years have been amazing.

With the Michael Smith Foundation as a leader, health researchers are staying in B.C. And we have been able to attract more researchers and more research money from outside the province. There is now enormous optimism and huge research productivity.

Since 2001, funds from the Michael Smith Foundation have supported 46 health researchers newly-recruited from outside BC, and 57 BC-based researchers just starting their research careers. This has added to the province's pool of health research expertise and further improves BC's competitiveness for national funding.

Already our province's health research community is becoming more competitive nationally. This is evidenced by its increased success in obtaining funds from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Canada's major health research funding agency.

In 2004/05, BC researchers brought home \$82 million in federal funding, in contrast to \$25 million in 1999/00. These funds are being spent in British Columbia to support research to improve health and care, train young researchers and employ research technicians and other support staff.

The work of the Foundation has contributed to British Columbia being recognized internationally as a centre of leading-edge health research. The BC Centre for Disease Control credits Foundation investment in facilities and people at the BC Cancer Agency's Genome Sciences Centre, who were able to provide the world its first glimpse of the genetic blueprint for the SARS virus.

In the last five years, some of the work of Michael Smith Foundation has included:

- Research focused on health system evaluation, redesign and innovation;
- The development of a research network for Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders, which has resulted in B.C. becoming the hub of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders network that spans Canada's western provinces and territories.

Other examples of government supported health research includes:

- Fast tracking the development of a SARS vaccine at BC Cancer due to the world-class expertise in genomics at the agency;
- The Leading Edge Endowment Fund to help fund the new Dr. Donald B. Rix B.C. Leadership Chair in Aboriginal Environmental Health;
- A biodiversity research centre and team at UBC to study all of life's variety, from single genes to entire ecosystems; and just this week
- Premier Gordon Campbell announced \$15 million for the Pacific Alzheimer Research Foundation to support new research aimed at eliminating Alzheimer's disease and related dementias.

Some members of the media today toured the Research Centre for Hip Health with Dr. Heather McKay. The centre will conduct research to decrease hip fractures and osteoarthritis, major factors in surgery waiting lists. Dr. McKay and her team are also members of the Michael Smith Foundation research family.

Our vision for B.C. to be a world leader in research is still being realized. In February's throne speech, we reaffirmed our commitment to research, to pursue new knowledge and to find better ways of providing for the health needs of British Columbians.

Success is only possible because of the opportunities like the ones created through the work of the Foundation members and researchers here today. If we want British Columbia to continue to be the province with the best health outcomes in Canada, then we have to make research commitments today. We recognized that in our throne speech when we referred to "innovation, research, and funding".

In 2005, we provided \$30 million. Today, we are providing the final payment of \$70 million. We have now fulfilled our pledge from the Throne Speech to provide \$100 million to the Michael Smith Foundation. The funding will support innovation and leadership in health research, while creating competitive advantages for the province.

Some of this funding will go to support research projects to be done by a record 170 graduate students and post doctoral fellows who will receive some of the funding to train with the province's best health researchers. The researchers – some are here today – will be conducting research projects across the spectrum of health research, including prevention of hip fractures, new methods for cancer diagnosis and better understanding of brain physiology.

I want to congratulate you on your successful efforts to secure funding through the Michael Smith foundation. Your work will help us maintain our position as leaders in health research, and will allow us to continue providing the best quality health care to British Columbians for generations to come.

One of the great things about investments is that they grow. That is why this government has invested more than one billion dollars in research and innovation since 2001. In fact, since our government was elected in 2001, the total investment in BC in the health research sector has grown by around 320%.

It is not just the provincial government that recognizes British Columbia's leadership. We have seen marked increases in funding from federal, private and non-profit sectors as well. These investments are going to pay huge dividends to our health care system, helping our province sustain the best health care system in the country.

I know that we have a few more speakers following me today, so I'd just like to close off by again acknowledging the amazing work of the Michael Smith Foundation. However, none of the achievements would have been possible without the dedication of the researchers past, present and future.

Thank you.