

The Canadian Health Infostructure (CHI): A Vital Link to the Future

With Canadians playing a more proactive role in health care and demanding sound information to make choices, the Canadian Health Infostructure (CHI) should go a long way in providing Canadians with reliable health information and online support.

What is the CHI? It is a health information highway – an infrastructure, or foundation, for health information. CHI will build on the traditional excellence of Canada's health-care system by providing a vital link to the future by harnessing new information and communications technologies to improve health and health care for Canadians.

In the 1999 Federal Budget, the government made an important commitment to the CHI, with an allocation of \$366 million, to support important "building blocks" in the CHI's development. Led by the Office of Health and the Information Highway, CHI includes projects within Health Canada, as well as partnerships with provinces, territories, non-governmental organizations, health-care providers and other key stakeholders.

Three of the building blocks for which the Department is playing a major role are:

- The **Canadian Health Network** (<http://www.canadian-health-network.ca>), which provides Canadians with easy access to trustworthy information on health promotion, disease prevention, self-care and the performance of the health system;
- The **National Health Surveillance Infostructure**, a series of projects to promote the transfer of and access to health information, using the Internet, to enable health surveillance professionals to do their job more efficiently;
- The **First Nations Health Information System**, which provides timely access to health information for improved case management, program planning and health surveillance of First Nations living on reserves.

Health Canada will invest \$80 million through the Canada Health Infostructure Partnerships Program (CHIPPP) to support innovative applications of modern information and communications technologies in health service delivery across Canada. Priority will be given to telehealth and electronic health records applications. ICT-based applications are emerging as an important enabler for improving the accessibility and quality of health care delivery, as well as the efficiency of the health system.

Given the importance that Canadians attach to the privacy of their personal health information, Health Canada is actively working to harmonize privacy protection and address the wide variations that currently exist in Canada. Through the Advisory Committee on Health Infostructure, created by the Conference of Deputy Ministers last June, collaborative work

on privacy, as well as strategic planning, telehealth and electronic health records, has begun.

The development of the CHI is well worth the effort. The CHI will ensure that Canada's health system is able to meet the challenges of the 21st century and beyond. Successful implementation of the CHI will result in better health information, improved access to health care, a more efficient system and ultimately – healthier Canadians.

For more information, check out the Office of Health and the Information Highway's Web site at: www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ohih-bsi A short video, *The Canada Health Infoway, Paths to Better Health* is also available at the Learning Centre. ■