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HEALTH HUMAN RESOURCES FIRST PRIORITY FOR FUNDING

WHITEHORSE – Health and Social Services Minister Brad Cathers today has announced the Yukon government’s plan for investing \$21.6 million to improve health care access over the next five years.

The money comes to the Yukon through the Territorial Health Access Fund (THAF) as a result of the September 2004 First Ministers’ Meeting. The success of this agreement is due to the pan-Northern approach used by the northern premiers and recognizes the inadequacy of per capita funding for Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut.

“At that meeting, it was agreed that there would be \$150 million directed towards health in the North,” Cathers said. “That money is finally starting to flow, and as part of the package, Yukon will receive \$4.3 million per year for the next five years. It will allow us to support initiatives to continue improving access to a wide variety of health services.

“This funding demonstrates the federal government’s recognition of the historic and unique challenges we face with the provision of health programming and services in the North. This funding is also a fine comment on the successful arguments of Premier Fentie and the two other northern premiers,” Cathers added.

The minister announced an overall framework for the THAF funding. Funding will be used to meet three established goals – building self-reliant capacity to provide services within the territory; strengthening community level access to services; and ensuring Yukon residents have the education and awareness tools to make informed health decisions.

A major initiative, under the goal of building local capacity, will be the development of a Health Human Resources Strategy to address the shortages of health professionals in the Yukon, for which approximately \$12.7 million has been identified for the next five years.

The key goal of the Health and Human Resource Strategy is to improve access to primary care for Yukoners.

“The cornerstone of this strategy will be an initiative focused on how to improve Yukoners’ access to family physicians and other health professionals. This includes nurses, physiotherapists, radiologists, laboratory technicians, and speech language pathologists. We need to make sure that we have a full range of health professionals to ensure that when Yukoners need those services, there are people here to provide them,” Cathers said.

The family physician component of the Health Human Resources Strategy will offer debt repayment in exchange for some years of service to graduates of Canadian medical schools. In addition, bursaries will be offered to Yukon students to assist them in attending Canadian medical schools.

“We are finalizing the details, but it is important that Yukoners know that this government is making investments in our public health care system and in our citizens,” Cathers added.

In addition to the THAF monies, each of the three territorial governments will receive funding to help pay for some of their medical travel costs. The Yukon will receive \$1.6 million per year for five years from the Medical Travel Fund.

“We will be using these funds to support Yukon residents, while we cover the increasing costs of medical travel. Announcements will be forthcoming on how we plan to do that,” Cathers said. “Our government will continue to ensure that we receive maximum benefit for our public health care system and for Yukon citizens.”

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