



## **Premiers Focus on Families**

**VANCOUVER, July 21, 2011** -- Premiers today lent their collective voice to emphasize the importance of families in the decisions their governments make and discussed how to address some of the many challenges Canadian families face. Premiers released a backgrounder showcasing some initiatives launched in their jurisdictions to promote wellness and stronger families.

### **Helping Parents and Ensuring Children have a Good Start**

Providing children with a good start is key to ensuring they grow into healthy adults with the best opportunities to succeed. Providing parents with choice about how to care for their children and making quality and accessible child care both affordable and available is critical.

Provinces and territories have been active in promoting early childhood development and have pursued policies that focus on increased parental choice and improvements in the quality of child care.

Premiers agreed that governments must work together to ensure adequate support for parents – for the benefit of families and the economy. Premiers noted that on their own, the current maternity and parental benefits under the EI program for participating provinces and territories are inadequate to provide the type of support required for many Canadian families to make parental leave a viable choice.

Premiers also noted that poor mental health and mental illness are the number one causes of disability in Canada, far greater than heart disease or cancer. Most Canadians will in some way be affected by mental health or mental illness, be it personally, or within their families. In economic terms, the costs associated with poor mental health in Canada amount to over \$50 billion every year. However, many negative mental health outcomes associated with mental illness can be prevented or effectively managed if addressed before adulthood. Premiers noted that mental health promotion and mental illness prevention are a priority issue and that their jurisdictions are already doing important work in this area. To build on these efforts, Manitoba will host a mental health summit of governments and key stakeholders in Winter 2011. Among the issues to be discussed will be dementia.

Premiers also agreed to work together to find opportunities to address issues related to autism spectrum disorder.

## **Opportunities for Youth**

Premiers agree that increasing opportunities for youth is a priority. Provinces and territories have programs that provide training for youth to help them find work. However, current federal activities in the area of labour market training for youth duplicate programming already in place at the provincial and territorial level. Devolution of federal programming, with funding, to provinces and territories would create a more coherent and integrated approach to labour market training, reduce inefficiencies, and support better outcomes for Canadian youth.

## **Healthy and Active Families**

Premiers agree that healthy living is a priority—not only because it improves the lives of individual Canadians, but also because it makes sense for our health care systems. By strengthening our health promotion, disease prevention and chronic illness strategies and improving the health of Canadians, governments can help make health care systems more effective and more sustainable.

Premiers committed to continue working across departments, ministries and jurisdictions on a more proactive approach to these issues and to promote physically and mentally healthy and active families. They noted that approaches that involve education, justice, housing, social services and other areas are necessary.

For example, Premiers encourage relevant Ministers to work together to improve child and youth health, including accelerating work to increase the number of opportunities for children and youth in the after school time period to engage in healthy active living.

Fifty-nine per cent of adult Canadians and 26% of Canadian children are overweight or obese. Obesity rates in children have almost tripled in the last 25 years. It is projected that in 20 years up to 70% of middle-age Canadians will be overweight or obese. Affected adults die three to seven years earlier than their counterparts. Obesity is difficult to reverse. As such, prevention in childhood is crucial.

Premiers encourage their Ministers of Health/Healthy Living to continue their collaboration on a number of initiatives that could lead to greater overall health for Canadians, including:

- reducing sodium and sugar in prepared foods;
- exploring health-promoting procurement and other guidelines for child care service providers, schools, recreation centres and other places where children and youth gather; and
- prevention, diagnosis, early intervention, research and support to those affected by Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder.

Actions taken by Canadians to improve their health not only improve their well-being but also improve the sustainability of health systems. Governments can support these positive outcomes through appropriate and cost-effective education and support.

## **Active and Independent Seniors**

Canada's population is aging. In 2009, there were 4.7 million seniors in Canada and this number is projected to double by 2036. Seniors are an integral part of our families and communities. In addition to providing valuable support and assistance to children and grandchildren, seniors contribute a wealth of knowledge and experience to society and are one of the most active groups of volunteers in communities.

Premiers identified three actions as examples of activities governments can take to help older people remain healthy, active and connected to their communities:

- encourage the development age-friendly communities that enable seniors to remain independent and in their homes for as long as possible;
- continue working together to improve Canada's income retirement system; and
- take measures to protect vulnerable seniors from victimization and abuse.

Building age-friendly communities involves developing policies, services, settings and structures across a wide range of ministries. Premiers agree to encourage a government-wide approach be taken to assist in this effort.

Premiers directed Finance Ministers to continue their work on improving Canada's retirement income system.

Premiers welcome the federal commitment to amend the *Criminal Code* to make it an aggravating factor in any offence if a victim is vulnerable due to age. Premiers commit to work jointly with the federal government on this so that progress is made quickly.

Premiers also directed Ministers of Justice to pursue their work with the federal Minister of Justice to examine approaches on how the criminal justice system could address concerns around the abuse and victimization of the elderly.

## **Volunteer and Non-Profit Sector**

Premiers acknowledged the vital role non-profits, charities and volunteer services play in providing services to families in our communities. In the coming year, Premier Clark will host a special summit with non-profits, charities and government to obtain advice on the best way to continue this vital role in the future.

- 30 -

### **For more information:**

**Nina Chiarelli**

Government of British Columbia

250-387-0793

Cell: 250-216-8426

[nina.chiarelli@gov.bc.ca](mailto:nina.chiarelli@gov.bc.ca)



## **MEDIA BACKGROUNDER**

### **Provincial and territorial initiatives to promote wellness and stronger families**

**VANCOUVER, July 21, 2011** – All provincial and territorial governments are active in the area of families and family health, including programs for children, parents and seniors. The following is a sampling of the many initiatives underway in provinces and territories to promote wellness and stronger families.

#### **ALBERTA – Active Alberta**

The Government of Alberta has long recognized the importance of recreation, active living and sport to the lives of Albertans, and has been closely involved with partners to develop a ten year plan to refocus initiatives in these areas. This new policy -- *Active Alberta* – is a province-wide initiative designed to counteract the trend toward inactive, sedentary lifestyles and inspire Albertans to become more active every day. In collaboration with non-profit organizations, other levels of government, the private sector, individuals, and other stakeholders, Active Alberta goes beyond raising public awareness to address six key objectives:

- encouraging more Albertans to more active, more often;
- ensuring Alberta communities are more active, creative, safe, and inclusive;
- enabling Albertans to remain connected with nature by exploring the outdoors;
- engaging Albertans in community-based recreation and volunteer activities;
- coordinating with partners to provide quality recreation, active living and sport opportunities; and
- ensuring Albertans have opportunities to achieve athletic excellence.

In meeting these objectives, Active Alberta will ensure Albertans enjoy a high quality of life, improved health and wellness, strong communities, economic benefits, and personal fulfillment, through recreation, active living and sport. More information can be found at: <http://tpr.alberta.ca/activealberta/default.aspx>

#### **BRITISH COLUMBIA – Healthy Families BC**

The \$68.7-million Healthy Families BC strategy will help families make healthy choices and introduce innovative approaches to challenges facing BC's health care system.

The four-pronged Healthy Families BC strategy will support families and communities in the following key areas:

- Healthy Lifestyles – supporting British Columbians in managing their own health and reducing chronic disease by working with physicians to ensure consistent delivery of proven prevention initiatives.
- Healthy Eating – initiatives aimed at supporting healthy choices, in the home, the school and the community and creating environments that support the provision of healthier foods and make their choice easier.
- Healthy Start – helping the most vulnerable families in British Columbia get the best start in life.

- **Healthy Communities**– encouraging British Columbians to lead healthier lives where they live, work, learn and play.

One component of the Healthy Start initiative will be the implementation of the Nurse Family Partnership (NFP) program, which provides additional support for the most vulnerable clients – young, first time, low income parents and their children from pregnancy through two years of age.

Another component is the Prescription for Health program, which will give BC doctors additional tools to conduct medical assessments and work with patients to develop a health promotion and illness prevention plan that best suits their medical needs and personal situation. Patients may identify a lifestyle change goal, which will be documented by the physician on a Prescription for Health.

More information regarding Healthy Families BC can be found at:  
<http://www.healthyfamiliesbc.ca/>.

### **MANITOBA – Healthy Child Manitoba**

Healthy Child Manitoba is a long-term, cross-departmental strategy to put children and families first. Guided by Canada’s only legislated committee of cabinet dedicated to the health and well-being of children and youth, the province has developed a network of supports including:

- **Healthy Baby**, aimed at improving the health of Manitoba’s most vulnerable babies and mothers. Prenatal benefits and education supports have resulted in fewer low weight and premature births, and a dramatic increase in breastfeeding rates.
- **Roots of Empathy**, helping school-aged children understand the feelings of others by introducing babies and their mothers into classrooms. It has cut the number of Manitoba kids getting into fights at school in half and is currently being expanded for younger children in child care, nursery school and preschool.
- **Positive Parenting Program**, helping parents create a loving, supportive and predictable home for their kids with easy-to-follow suggestions for small changes that can make a big difference.

### **NEW BRUNSWICK – Promoting Independence and Healthy Living for Seniors**

New Brunswick is taking action to encourage seniors to be healthy, active and independent for as long as possible. By taking charge of their health, seniors will enjoy an improved quality of life.

The Senior and Healthy Aging Secretariat was established to co-ordinate the implementation of New Brunswick’s long-term care strategy *Be Independent Longer*. Actions to date include development and distribution of helpful information for seniors, public awareness campaigns on wellness and active living, the designation of the 3rd week in October as Healthy Active Living Week for Seniors, healthy living sessions in partnership with senior’s organizations, telephone reassurance and friendly visiting programs through the Red Cross, funding for community resource centres and day activity centres.

The partnership with Red Cross provides friendly visiting, telephone reassurance and transportation for isolated seniors. Managed by Red Cross these services are delivered by volunteers recruited by RC.

For more information on the Senior and Healthy Aging Secretariat, please refer to: <http://www.gnb.ca/0182/index-e.asp>.

### **NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR – Mental Health and Addictions**

Recognizing the profound effect that mental health and addictions have on individuals, families and communities, the government of Newfoundland and Labrador is making significant investments throughout the province in mental health and addictions services to increase awareness and strengthen mental health services. In the last two years alone, the government has invested \$15.9 million to enhance mental health and addictions services.

Through Budget 2011, the government invested \$4.5 million to begin planning of a new mental health facility in St. John's, \$1.1 million to implement new initiatives to demystify mental illness and break down barriers, and \$2.2 million for the placement of five, full-time mental health and addictions counsellors in Nain, Hopedale, Makkovik and Natuashish.

In addition, plans are underway for a provincial public awareness campaign to further reduce the stigma associated with mental illness and to increase understanding of how and when to seek help.

### **NORTHWEST TERRITORIES – Career Planning**

In 2008, a unique partnership between the Government of the Northwest Territories Department of Education, Culture and Employment and BHP Billiton was established to bring two innovative career planning programs to NWT students. *Smart Focusing* for students in grades 8 and 9 and *Career Focusing* in high schools help students to become aware of their "gifts" and the way that these strengths can connect them to various types of work in the world. Students learn about education and training options after school and how to use post-secondary information to understand program pre-requisites in order to 'back-map' their course selections through school.

Results of the two-year pilots indicate that the programs are having a profoundly positive impact on students' ability to make a plan that supports their course selection in high school and transition from school into a post secondary pathway. Whether the pathway involves on-the-job training, apprenticeship or an institution of formal learning, students have a clear understanding of what 'work that fits' looks like for them, why it fits and why they have selected the pathway in their plan.

### **NOVA SCOTIA – Healthy Eating in Child-Care Settings**

Nova Scotia has introduced regulated comprehensive food and nutrition standards under the *Day Care Act* and Regulations. The *Standards for Food and Nutrition in Regulated Child-Care Settings* ensure:

- menus are based on food groups identified by Health Canada
- clean drinking water and food safety
- special dietary considerations can be met
- nutrition education is provided; and
- breast milk is labelled and stored consistently.

The Act also gives centres more support and flexibility in preparing healthy meals and snacks. The new regulations allow centres to develop and change menus based on a clear set of standards for nutrition and provide numerous tools and tips.

For more information on the new *Standards*, please see:  
<http://www.gov.ns.ca/coms/families/provider/NewDayCareRegs.html>

### **NUNAVUT – ASIST**

As part of the territorial suicide prevention initiative, the Department Health and Social Services, the Department of Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs, Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated and Health Canada have been working together on the development of a territory-wide suicide alertness and intervention training campaign called *Uqaqatigiiluk!/Talk about it!* This campaign uses the internationally recognized Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST) and has been translated into Inuktitut. For more information on the territorial Suicide Prevention Initiative, please see: <http://www.hss.gov.nu.ca/en/Your%20Health%20MHA%20Suicide.aspx>

### **ONTARIO – Aging at Home Strategy**

Ontario recently expanded its Aging at Home Strategy. This initiative provides health care services to approximately 350,000 seniors to help them age in the comfort of their own homes. It permits Ontario's seniors to lead healthy and independent lives with dignity while avoiding unnecessary visits to hospitals, which can ultimately reduce ER wait times. The initiative will benefit seniors participating in approximately 1,400 Aging at Home projects. Investing in better local community supports will help improve Ontario's Alternate Level of Care (ALC) rate. ALC patients are individuals in hospital beds who would be better cared for in an alternate setting, such as long-term care, rehab, or home. By giving seniors the support they need to avoid hospitalization in the first place and helping those who do get admitted return home faster, access to health care will be improved for all Ontarians.

### **PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND – Girls Unlimited**

Through funding from the PEI government, a local community organization designed and implemented a series of girl/caregiver workshops across PEI for girls ages 10 -14 and their parents/caregivers to enhance girl's self-esteem and confidence. The project was designed to provide girls and their caregivers with information to support them in dealing with the emotional, social and cultural issues they may face. There were a number of workshops that took place across the province, including one in the Francophone community and one in the newcomer's community.

Five English language and one French language Girls Unlimited Conferences were held across Prince Edward Island. The conferences were well attended and had positive feedback from the participants. The main sessions for the conferences focused on media literacy, physical/mental/emotional health, self-esteem and body image. This upcoming year, a similar project has been funded to work with young boys in Prince Edward Island.

### **QUÉBEC – 2006-2012 Government Action Plan to Promote Healthy Lifestyles and Prevent Weight-Related Problems**

In October 2006, the Government of Quebec announced its action plan entitled [Investir pour l'avenir](#) [Investing for the future] and declared its commitment to a collective strategy to improve the quality of life and well-being of Quebecers by enabling them to live in environments that promote the adoption and maintenance of healthy lifestyles. In keeping with that action plan and with two measures outlined in the [2006-2009 Youth Action Strategy](#), the Ministry of Education, Recreation and Sports (MELS), with the participation of the Ministry of Health and Social Services (MSSS) and the Quebec

Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAPAQ), published the Framework Policy on Healthy Eating and Active Living. Through this action, it has demonstrated its firm intention to make Quebec academic institutions places where students can eat better and be more active. An initiative such as this is not possible, however, without the commitment and participation of all school community stakeholders and partners, who will need to continue working together to ensure the future of youth and our society.

### **SASKATCHEWAN – Children and Youth Agenda**

In March 2011, the Saskatchewan government announced that is investing more than \$34 million in a new, cross-government approach to the complex issues facing Saskatchewan children, youth and families through the Saskatchewan Children and Youth Agenda. The Children and Youth Agenda identifies funding and programs across several ministries that address common problems facing children and families at risk, such as lower education levels, unemployment and substance abuse. The cross-government agenda will allow for a comprehensive, targeted approach to these challenges. Funding initiatives announced in the March 2011 budget include:

- \$7 million for Adult Basic Education and Provincial Training Allowance targeted to First Nations and Métis students;
- \$2.9 million to increase high school completion rates and improve achievement for First Nations and Métis students;
- \$1 million to develop a 24/7 intensive family support model to prevent children from coming into care;
- \$900,000 to enhance rehabilitation therapies and/or frontline services for individuals with Autism.

For more information on Saskatchewan's Children and Youth Agenda, please see: <http://www.finance.gov.sk.ca/budget2011-12/SSBackgrounder.pdf>.

### **YUKON – Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD)**

FASD is a priority issue for Yukon due to the significant impact this 100% preventable disability has on our communities. Yukon's multi-sectoral work in this area, with a focus on prevention, diagnosis, early intervention and support to those affected by FASD, is an example of how Yukon is being proactive to support improved health outcomes and quality of life for individuals and families, along with the long-term sustainability of our government's health and social services. Continuing to support the Canada Northwest FASD Research Network, along with other provinces and territories, and sharing promising practices and evidence-based approaches will also assist in FASD prevention and provide supports and interventions to those affected by FASD. For more information, please see: <http://www.hss.gov.yk.ca/fasd.php>.

- 30 -

#### **For more information:**

**Nina Chiarelli**

Government of British Columbia

250-387-0793

Cell: 250-216-8426

[nina.chiarelli@gov.bc.ca](mailto:nina.chiarelli@gov.bc.ca)