

INVESTING IN HEALTH CARE

Several initiatives are underway to increase the number of health care professionals working in Manitoba. The Province has recognized that the best strategy to increase the number of health professionals working in rural communities is to train them in rural communities. Therefore, opportunities are now more widely available through additional training spaces for front-line health care professionals in rural communities. For

instance, rotating training programs for licensed practical nurses (LPN) and paramedics have been held in communities such as Steinbach, Morden/Winkler, The Pas, Dauphin, Souris, Portage la Prairie, Gimli and Neepawa. As well, the highest number of rural students is now enrolled in the first year faculty of medicine class at the University of Manitoba.

The number of nurses practicing in Manitoba will also increase as a result of a recent recruitment mission to the Philip-

pines. The Province made conditional offers of employment to 131 nurses from the Philippines and expects the majority of these nurses to be successfully placed. Candidates will be placed in the Assiniboine, Brandon, and Parkland regional health authorities (RHAs) and will work as graduate nurses while preparing to complete the registration process to work in Manitoba.

As well, *MBTelehealth* is connecting rural Manitobans with health care. A recent Provincial investment of \$126,000 will expand *MBTelehealth* to Virden, Deloraine and Hamiota. Doctors and health care providers in these communities will be able to connect with other specialists through an interactive video connection. Specialized equipment like handheld cameras and digital stethoscopes will be available to help share information. With this expansion, 50 communities and 17 Winnipeg locations will have an *MBTelehealth* site including at least one in each RHA.

The Province will also establish teams of healthy living professionals to address chronic disease prevention and promote healthy living services across Manitoba. Each RHA will create a community team, with a goal of 44 new health professionals being hired overall.

NORTHERN HEALTHY FOODS

Many northern Manitoba communities are becoming more self-sufficient under a series of projects supported by the Province. Since launching the Northern Healthy Foods Initiative in 2005, more than 400 vegetable gardens have been planted and some residents are now raising their own animals. The Province is funding the initiative in 2008-09 with grants totalling more than \$600,000, which has leveraged support from a number of other sources. There are now 28 communities engaged in various projects including 160 community freezers to preserve locally harvested wildlife products, eight greenhouses, and 15 families engaged in chicken and goat farming.

WATERSMART MANITOBA

The Province recently announced WaterSmart Manitoba, a new incentive program to reward Manitobans who make water-efficiency improvements. The Province projects Manitobans could save at least 80 million litres of water annually and households would collectively cut their water bills by \$2 million. The program includes incentives such as: expanding the Power Smart loan program to include high-efficiency toilets; doubling the Federal Government's \$50 EcoENERGY rebate for



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dual-flush, high efficiency toilets; providing instant \$50 rebates for dual-flush toilets at selected retailers; expanding Manitoba's province-wide, low income, energy-efficiency program to include water efficiency; and launching consultations on how to restrict the sale of inefficient fixtures such as 13-litre toilets. The Province is investing \$500,000 in WaterSmart in its first year, which will be officially launched in January 2009. More information is available at www.gov.mb.ca/seeinggreen/watersmart.html.

NEW CHILD CARE SPACES

The five-year Family Choices strategy aims to provide Provincial funding for 6,500 more child care spaces, and 10 schools with surplus space were recently identified to help meet this goal. These 10 sites will be modified to include child care centres and develop 343 spaces at a cost of \$1.5 million. The Province indicated that funding for 2,350 child care spaces will be available this year, including 1,077 newly created spaces.

At the same time there is a crucial need for an aggressive recruitment and retention plan for child care workers, therefore the Province will implement: wage increases; a minimum base wage; increased training;

workplace training; expanded programs; wage subsidies; a public awareness campaign to highlight the benefits of working in the field; a scholarship fund; an apprenticeship program; fast-tracking license options; and director skills training.

More information about Family Choices is available at www.gov.mb.ca/familychoices.


HIGHWAY FUNDING

The Province's Highway Renewal Plan was first announced in 2006 to allocate \$400 million per year to highway investment over a 10-year period. The 2009-10 construction season will benefit from an additional \$45 million, \$15 million of which was previously announced and an additional \$30 million in new capital for accelerated highway renewal. This investment brings next year's highway budget to approximately \$460 million.

Projects will include: over \$50 million in capital for more than 50 bridges and structures; improvements to over 100 kilometres of the Trans-Canada Highway; continuing work on PTH 2, 3, 8, 10, 59, 68, 75, 373, and 374; resurfacing of 1A (First Street) in Brandon and continuing work on the 18th Street bridges and the Brandon

eastern access; and continuing work on the road on the east side of Lake Winnipeg.

BIODIESEL REGULATION

In the 2007 Throne Speech, the Province committed to develop a mandate for biodiesel and recently developed a regulation under *The Manitoba Biofuels Act* to support this mandate. *The Biodiesel (General) Regulation* is in effect as of December 15 and establishes fuel standards for the production of biodiesel. Requirements include: licenses to manufacture biodiesel; reporting and record keeping by license holders; fuel quality standards for biodiesel and blends of biodiesel and petroleum diesel fuel; and penalties for failing to comply with comply with a biodiesel license. Manufacturers intending to sell biodiesel in Manitoba or produce 15,000 litres or more of biodiesel annually will be required to have a commercial license. Small-scale manufacturers producing less than 15,000 litres annually for their own use will be required to apply for a non-commercial manufacturing license. Additional information is available at: www.gov.mb.ca/stem/energy/biofuels/biodiesel/index.html. 

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