
NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Health

2015: Record investment strengthens health-care system

VICTORIA – British Columbia’s strong economic growth and fiscal discipline have meant the highest-ever investment in the health of British Columbians, reaching a record \$19.1 billion in 2015-16.

“B.C.’s strong, growing economy allows us to make significant investments into building and strengthening our health-care system,” said Health Minister Terry Lake. “As a result, we’ve made some incredible strides in our continued goal to foster a system that is truly patient-centred.”

In 2014-15, there was \$900 million of health-sector investment in renewed and expanded infrastructure. In 2015-16, this is forecast to grow to \$1.04 billion. This includes investment in projects like the new \$381-million Interior Heart and Surgical Centre at Kelowna General Hospital and the \$606-million North Island Hospitals project. In 2015, government announced \$259 million for the first phase of redevelopment of the Royal Columbian Hospital in New Westminster and a commitment to a brand-new St. Paul’s Hospital in Vancouver.

The Government of B.C. announced a \$10-million investment to increase surgical capacity throughout the province in June. This first phase of the surgical services strategy is focused on patients who have waited more than 40 weeks. As part of this, health authorities completed approximately 3,900 additional surgeries between June and November. Further increases will continue through March 2016.

A new four-year MRI strategy will help health authorities address patient wait-lists for MRIs by making 65,000 more scans available each year once fully implemented. Extending operating hours for MRI machines and contracting private facilities to perform additional procedures will allow more patients to be served each day.

The Ministry of Health and health authorities are committed to making sure British Columbians have access to high-quality primary care. Fourteen internationally trained family physicians have started practicing in rural and remote communities throughout B.C., including Castlegar, Dawson Creek, Fort St. John, Hazelton, Invermere, Lillooet, McBride, Port Hardy, Powell River, Terrace and Quesnel. This work is supported by an investment of \$2.8 million by the Joint Standing Committee on Rural Issues – a collaborative committee of the Ministry of Health and Doctors of BC.

Since 2013, more than 88,000 vulnerable patients are now matched with a family doctor thanks to the work of physicians and other partners through the A GP for Me program. Additionally, in June, a two-day health-care forum took place with care providers and administrators from 10 communities. Together, they strategized on different ways of working together in their

community so the system better supports elderly patients.

In October, a followup workshop was held for health-care staff and physicians to lay out plans for new models of primary and community care in 14 communities. These communities will serve as prototypes for implementing change to seniors' services and supports at the community level across the health system.

Government recognizes that safe environments are essential to the health and well-being of patients and staff who work in facilities. As part of the ministry's Violence Prevention Action Plan, the Ministry of Health and B.C. Nurses' Union is jointly providing \$2 million to fund violence prevention actions at sites that deal with some of the province's most complex patients. The first four priority sites are Forensic Psychiatric Hospital in Coquitlam, Hillside Centre in Kamloops, Seven Oaks Tertiary Mental Health in Victoria and Abbotsford Regional Hospital. Additional sites will be selected.

The B.C. government is committed to providing the best supports for people facing challenges associated with mental illness and substance use, investing more than \$1.42 billion per year in mental-health and substance-use services. The Province is working with health authorities and community partners to create a system of mental-health and substance-use care that wraps around the patient and provides an improved community-based network of support.

This includes continued progress on a comprehensive \$25-million action plan to address the needs of people with severe and complex substance use and or mental illness concerns, with 12 new community-based teams established in 2015. That brought the total number of teams that provide assertive outreach, assertive community treatment and intensive case management across the province to 40. Adding to these supports, almost 200 new beds for people with substance use have been opened as part of the 500 new beds to come online by 2017.

Government is also building significant new mental-health facilities. Work is underway on a 75-bed community mental-health facility at the redeveloped Royal Columbian Hospital site, to open in 2019, as well as a new 105-bed facility on the Riverview Lands. The \$57-million Joseph and Rosalie Segal Centre will open at Vancouver General Hospital in 2017. The HOpe Centre for Psychiatry and Education in North Vancouver, which opened last year, provides integrated hospital and outpatient services, thanks to a \$38-million government investment.

B.C. has the overall best cancer-survival rates in Canada and among the best survival rates for breast cancer. The Ministry of Health provided \$940,000 to help bring in the province's first mobile-screening mammography program vehicles. The coaches are equipped with a wheelchair lift, a waiting area and an examination room to provide women with a comfortable and consistent mammography experience at all locations. The Province also provided \$2 million to the BC Cancer Foundation to support world-leading genomic research to improve outcomes for breast cancer patients and save lives.

To further build on this work, in December 2015, the government announced \$50 million in funding for the Michael Smith Foundation for Health Research to support groundbreaking research in B.C. This is in line with the recently released venture capital fund, the basis for a comprehensive technology strategy, which encourages the growth of technology in B.C., recognizing that advances in technology will lead to much more personalized and effective health care.

“As we say good bye to 2015, I’d like to wish British Columbians a happy, healthy New Year and celebrate a few of our successes from this past year,” said Lake. “Stepping into 2016, we will continue our strategic focus to move away from our dependence on hospitals by building community and primary-care capacity, revitalizing rural health care and continuing to promote healthy lifestyles.”

“We have made great strides over the past year, and I expect the year ahead to include even more achievements and accomplishments to celebrate.”

To hear an audio clip of Health Minister Terry Lake talking about the year in health, please visit: <https://soundcloud.com/bcgov/minister-lake-2015-health-achievements>

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