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## NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Children and Family Development  
Provincial Health Services Authority

### **Premature infants and their parents to benefit from new partnership**

VANCOUVER – Premature babies and their parents throughout British Columbia will now benefit from an innovative skin-to-skin attachment program that has long-term benefits for both mom and baby.

The Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) is making a \$500,000, one-time investment. This will enable Perinatal Services BC and BC Women’s Hospital + Health Centre to increase the availability of Kangaroo Mother Care (KMC) for all at-risk and premature babies who are spending their first moments of life in a neonatal intensive care unit (NICU).

“By strengthening the bond between parent and child through skin-to-skin contact, Kangaroo Mother Care will allow us to support B.C.’s smallest and most vulnerable babies from the moment they are born,” said Katrine Conroy, Minister of Children and Family Development. “This early intervention will boost the health and well-being of these children and enable them to thrive, throughout their childhood and beyond.”

Kangaroo Mother Care aims to promote skin-to-skin contact between at-risk and premature infants and their parents. Skin-to-skin contact is recommended for all new parents and infants, but KMC is particularly beneficial to premature babies. This program aims to increase the length of time babies spend skin-to-skin with moms and partners.

“The Kangaroo Mother Care model of care means less separation for families and is a key way to help ensure these vulnerable babies get the very best start in life,” said Adrian Dix, Minister of Health. “Supports like Kangaroo Care, and emphasizing mother-baby contact, will help promote bonding and reduce stress, improving the lives of almost 5,000 families in B.C.”

Each year, approximately 5,000 babies are born prematurely in B.C. Each child is at risk of long-term health and developmental issues, including hearing loss, problems with their vision, behavioural problems and neurological disorders like cerebral palsy. Mothers with premature infants are also significantly affected, with up to 70% experiencing postpartum depression, compared to around 15% for mothers who deliver their infants at full-term.

“BC Women’s has educated families on how to safely practice skin-to-skin Kangaroo Care for many years and has seen the positive results,” said Dr. Horacio Osioyich, head of Neonatology at BC Women’s Hospital + Health Centre. “We’re happy to see this program extended across the province – a move that will benefit B.C.’s most fragile babies and their families.”

Kangaroo Mother Care has been proven to have long-term benefits to families by reducing anxiety, stress and the risk of depression in both mother and child. It also helps to stabilize the baby’s temperature, promote parent-child attachment, and encourage breastfeeding.

“Kangaroo Mother Care is a low-tech, evidence-based intervention that promotes maternal and infant health, and can be practised in the hospital and at home,” said Dr. Tamil Kendall, provincial executive director of Perinatal Services BC. “Perinatal Services BC is delighted to have this opportunity to participate in increasing access for families throughout the province.”

This investment covers the cost of launching the program throughout B.C., including training and educational materials for nurses and parents. It will also help to provide wraps that support skin-to-skin contact, known as kangaroo mother baby wraps.

“Encouraging the early connection between baby and mother can provide many benefits, including boosting the baby’s social and emotional development,” said Judy Darcy, Minister of Mental Health and Addictions. “By promoting Kangaroo Mother Care throughout the province, we are supporting the mother and child bond, giving premature babies an environment that will enhance their cognitive and emotional development.”

Until recently, NICU care has been focused on life-saving measures. A culture shift is taking place across neonatal care that incorporates life-saving interventions, along with the integration of parents as partners in their baby’s care through programs like KMC. This program supports health-care providers and parents in expanding their ability to provide this important component of the care experience, with a goal of improving outcomes for mothers and newborns. KMC has been shown to facilitate earlier hospital discharge.

MCFD’s \$500,000 investment is facilitated through the BC Women’s Hospital Foundation. Several other partners, including the Women’s Health Research Institute and Regional Health Authorities, have committed to work with Perinatal Services BC and BC Women’s Hospital to ensure the long-term success of the program. Work that moves toward the program’s implementation in NICUs throughout the province will begin immediately.

#### **Quick Facts:**

- Kangaroo Mother Care promotes skin-to-skin contact between mothers and their newborn babies who are premature and at risk. Partners can also provide Kangaroo Care.
- The baby is placed on the mother or partner’s bare chest wearing only a diaper. The baby and mom are then secured in a wrap to facilitate the care. Ideally, Kangaroo Mother Care takes place 24/7; current standard of care involves sessions that last a minimum of 90 minutes.
- For 40 years, Kangaroo Mother Care has been helping to reduce stress, anxiety and the risk of depression, as well as improving long-term physical, mental and social wellness and function.
- Post-partum depression can have a significant effect on the long-term health and wellness of both the mother and child.

#### **Learn More:**

BC Women’s Hospital + Health Centre: [www.bcwomens.ca/](http://www.bcwomens.ca/)

BC Women’s Hospital + Health Centre Foundation: [www.bcwomensfoundation.org/](http://www.bcwomensfoundation.org/)

Perinatal Services BC: [www.perinatalservicesbc.ca](http://www.perinatalservicesbc.ca)

Women’s Health Research Institute: <http://whri.org/>

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