



COMMITMENTS TO ABORIGINAL HEALTH

On September 13, 2004, a special meeting with the Prime Minister, First Ministers and Aboriginal leaders was held in Ottawa to discuss joint actions to improve Aboriginal health, and adopt measures to address the disparity in the health status of this population. In support of the agreed upon directions, the federal government announced total funding in the amount of \$700 million for a series of new federal commitments that will address urgent and critical aspects of a longer term plan:

- \$200 million for an **Aboriginal Health Transition Fund** to enable governments and communities to devise new ways to integrate and adapt existing health services to better meet the needs of Aboriginal people.
- \$100 million for an **Aboriginal Health Human Resources Initiative** to increase Aboriginal people choosing health care professions; adapt current health professional curricula to provide a more culturally sensitive focus; and improve the retention of health workers serving Aboriginal people.
- \$400 million for **health promotion and disease prevention programs** focusing on diabetes, suicide prevention, maternal and child health, and early childhood development.

The Aboriginal Health Transition Fund

The Aboriginal Health Transition Fund will comprise of three funding areas:

- The Pan-Canadian area will support initiatives on a pan-Canadian level to advance integration and adaptation of health services and programs for Aboriginal people beyond what any single jurisdiction can achieve on its own; and address common barriers to integration and adaptation.
- The Provincial and territorial area will support provincial and territorial governments in adapting their programs and services to Aboriginal populations' specific needs.
- The Regional and Local Initiatives area will support specific projects to integrate health services or programs for Aboriginal people; and adapt existing programs and services to the unique needs of Aboriginal communities more generally.

The Fund is intended to result in:

- Better integration of health services for Aboriginal people: building capacity and improving coordination of the delivery of health services.

- Improved access to health care services: improving effective access to health care for Aboriginal people.
- Health programs and services that are better-suited to Aboriginal people: supporting the adaptation of health programs to better meet the unique needs of different Aboriginal populations.
- Increased involvement of Aboriginal people: involving Aboriginal people more fully in the design, delivery and evaluation of health programs and services.

The Aboriginal Health Human Resources Initiative

Acknowledging that there are challenges unique to First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities, the goal of this initiative is to improve access to quality health services for Aboriginal peoples through:

- Training Aboriginal People: increasing the number of Aboriginal people choosing careers as physicians, registered nurses and other health care professionals;
- Changing the Curricula: adapting current health professional curricula to train health professionals that are better equipped to address the cultural differences of Aboriginal peoples; and
- Improving Retention: improving the retention of qualified health care providers serving Aboriginal communities.

Through the Aboriginal Health Human Resources initiative, we hope to build a workforce that will meet the unique health service needs of Aboriginal peoples, and respond to current, new and emerging health services issues and priorities in the Aboriginal population.

Investments in Aboriginal Health - Health Promotion and Disease Prevention

One of the most effective mechanisms to improve health outcomes is through disease prevention and health promotion activities. Significant improvements in the long-term health status of Aboriginal peoples could be achieved by addressing two priority areas:

- early intervention, prevention and health promotion activities focussed on addressing the high rates of diabetes and suicide; and
- programming for maternal and child health and early childhood development.

The Government of Canada has demonstrated strong commitment to working with Aboriginal organizations and communities to address the disparity in health status between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Canada.

Over the longer-term, the desired outcome is to significantly close the gap that Aboriginal people experience in terms of infant mortality and life expectancy through investment in activities that include:

- Enhancing the Aboriginal Diabetes Initiative: enhancing this initiative to continue to address diabetes epidemic.
- Developing a National Aboriginal Youth Suicide Prevention Strategy: increasing resiliency and reducing risks of Aboriginal youth suicide by undertaking activities such as prevention, early intervention, and crisis response.
- Enhancing Child and Maternal Health programs & Expanding the Aboriginal Head Start program: helping to ensure Aboriginal children get the best start in life by expanding supports and services that are vital for the healthy development of Aboriginal children.

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