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| Colombie-Britannique | 40e | 2e | Discours sur la santé | 26 mai 2014 | Terry Lake | Minister of Health | British Columbia Liberal Party |

Before we begin, I'd like to introduce the ministry staff members who've joined me here today. On my right is Stephen Brown, who's the Deputy Minister of Health. On my left is Manjit Sidhu, who is the assistant deputy minister responsible for financial aspects and capital.

I also want to take the opportunity — if I may indulge, hon. Chair — to thank all of the dedicated front-line health care staff and professionals throughout the province of British Columbia. We have an amazing team of people to look after British Columbians every day in our hospitals, in our community services and, in fact, in many different settings around the province, looking after health care.

Also, the civil service staff within the Ministry of Health work very hard at ensuring that this very large health care system provides the right care for the right person at the right time. I know they're extremely hard-working, and I appreciate their hard work, which allows me to do my job and represent the hard work that they do.

I also want to recognize some of the personal staff that we have working in the Ministry of Health — my chief of staff, Sabrina Loiacono; ministerial assistant Mario Miniaci; executive assistants Marie Alaimo and Dana Dobrowolski; as well as some of our other staff who ensure that our office is functioning — Shaina Jukes, Victoria Kline and Debbie Wade. It's clear from that list that it requires a lot of hard-working people to keep the minister on task and doing the job for the health care system.

Our health care system, as I'm sure many are aware, is a large percentage of the entire budget — about 42 percent. Our health care funding is increasing by $385 million in fiscal year 2014-15 to a total of $16.9 billion.

In fact, over the next three years we're adding a total of $2.54 billion in new funding to health care, so within three years our budget will increase to $17.9 billion in the '16-17 fiscal year. To put it into perspective, that's more than double the 2000-2001 budget of $8.3 billion — an amazing increase in only 12 years.

On the capital side, another $2.6 billion is going towards new hospital construction and upgrades. We've got additions, improvements, new buildings right across British Columbia from Kamloops, my home community, to Kelowna; from Burns Lake to Haida Gwaii; Campbell River and Comox. We're spending significantly and upgrading our health care system.

We also understand that our government needs to respect every taxpayer and make every tax dollar count. For my ministry, which does consume so much of the budget of the province of British Columbia, that means slowing the rate of growth while still providing British Columbians with a sustainable health care system at the best possible value for the dollars that we spend.

It's not just in B.C. where we see this happening. You can see it, in fact, across Canada. Every province is trying to bend down the cost curve in terms of health care increases, from 3 percent increases in Alberta to zero increases in New Brunswick. This is a definite change in philosophy — that we need to bend down the cost curve while maintaining health services that British Columbians can rely upon.

We will continue to invest more in front-line health care. Health authorities are receiving more of the increase than across the board. They are receiving an 8 percent increase over the next three years. We do that by seeking efficiencies across the system so that we can maintain the funding to the front line.

We'll also continue to focus on patient-centred outcomes and work collaboratively with our partners. That includes, obviously, the regional and provincial health authorities and First Nations Health Authority as well as the dedicated professionals on the ground — the caregivers, doctors, nurses, allied support staff.

We want to preserve a strong health care system for ourselves, obviously, but for our loved ones and for future generations. Taking the proper steps now means a sustainable health system down the road. I want to take a second to acknowledge the Health ministers that have gone before me, because a lot of the hard work that was done four, five, six years ago is starting to pay off in terms of the ability to create a sustainable health care system.

In the past I've talked about a triple-aim approach to health care, and I want to mention it again. We're a national leader when it comes to this idea of Triple Aim. That means improving the health of the entire population but also increasing and improving the patient experience, including health outcomes, while providing value for money.

Triple Aim has been promoted for a number of years by the Institute for Healthcare Improvement of the United States, but it's been emulated in the National Health Service in Great Britain and in other world-leading organizations in health care.

Here in B.C., Triple Aim really does work. We have, over the years, managed to bend down the increases in health care spending yet still provide high-quality health care services and health outcomes. In fact, our province has some of the best health outcomes in the world.

Life expectancy in British Columbia is the highest in Canada at 82 years of age. I had lunch with my 82-year-old dad yesterday, and I reminded him of that — that he's on borrowed time. I think he's got quite a few good years ahead of him.

B.C. has the best overall cancer survival rates in Canada, according to the 2013 estimates in the Canadian Cancer Society's statistics of Canadian cancer. Mortality rates for all cancers combined are lowest here in British Columbia.

With that triple-aim approach, we'll continue to provide the very best service within the sustainability of the funding dollars.

We know our population is growing as well as aging, and our government and the dedicated health professionals and the members of our Ministry of Health are working to develop specific plans to address these changes. That includes building a very strong primary health care system.

The A GP for Me program and our nurse practitioners for B.C. program are, in fact, helping. Through these programs we're getting more physicians and nurse practitioners into communities to help patients manage their health care — always a challenge, we know, when it comes to smaller communities and rural areas of any jurisdiction.

We're also working very hard to help those with mental health and substance-use issues, which is a very challenging field of endeavour in health care. Last November the ministry created a mental health action plan to reduce barriers and service gaps and support evidence-based solutions for patients with severe substance-use addictions and mental illness. We are in the completion stage of the action items on that plan.

We recently announced that people with severe addictions and mental illness can find help by meeting challenges of day-to-day living with two new assertive community treatment teams. These are teams that supply treatment and rehabilitation for clients struggling with mental illness and include a whole range of health professionals to provide life skill supports, 24-7 health care, job training assistance, independent housing, social interaction counseling, as well as maintaining physical and mental wellness.

This expansion of our assertive community treatment teams is just one of many strategies being developed in response to the province's mental health action plan and report.

As I mentioned, the Health Ministers that have gone before me have done an amazing job. I'm benefiting and we as British Columbians are benefiting from the work that's gone ahead of me. Since I was named Health Minister, I've seen a lot of work done within government, and I want to thank my staff for the great support that they have given me to help the health of British Columbians.

I know we have a lot of work to do to continue to provide the right care in the right place at the right time. I'm looking forward to hearing any questions members may have regarding the Ministry of Health budget and our programs.