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| ***Province*** | ***Législature*** | ***Session*** | ***Type de discours*** | ***Date du discours*** | ***Locuteur*** | ***Fonction du locuteur*** | ***Parti politique*** |
| Saskatchewan | 26e | 1e | Discours sur la santé | 21 avril 2008 | Don McMorris | Minister of Health | Saskatchewan Party |

Thank you, Mr. Chair. Certainly glad to hear your voice this week; last week it was a little rough, a little tough to get through the committee hearings from what I was listening to. But I don’t know if you had to access the health care system, but I trust that it’s got you to the shape that you’re in and will only continue to improve.

Thanks for the opportunity to present the Ministry of Health’s estimates and answer any questions about our plans for 2008 and 2009. First I’d like to introduce senior ministerial staff who have helped shape our strategy and will assist me in answering any of the questions that come before us today. On my left is Gren Smith-Windsor, acting deputy minister. On my right is Lauren Donnelly, assistant deputy minister. Behind me to my left is Ted Warawa, executive director, finance and administration branch; and behind me to my right is Dr. Louise Greenberg, associate deputy minister.

Other officials that I have seated behind me are Brad Havervold, executive director, medical services branch; Carol Chernick-Smith, director of capital and regional services branch; Deb Jordan, executive director, acute and emergency services branch; Donna Magnusson, executive director, primary health services branch; Kevin Wilson, executive director, drug plan and extended benefits branch; Roger Carriere, executive director community care branch; Ron Knaus, executive director workforce planning branch; Scott Livingstone, executive director health information solution centre; Tyson Martin is a master’s oft public administration intern position; and Lauren Black, assistant to the deputy minister. So that’s lots of help behind me.

I have some statements to start with and I’ll go through that and then be glad to answer any questions. I’ll begin by restating our government’s commitment to a publicly funded, publicly administered health care system.

The Ministry of Health’s 2008-2009 budget is a record $3.745 billion, an increase of 300 million or almost 9 per cent. Just over 70 per cent of the budget is directed to compensation for physicians, nurses, and other health professionals. About 17 per cent covers the costs of drugs and medication, surgical and laboratory supplies. Five per cent is directed to infrastructure, 7 per cent covers general operating costs and items such as out-of-province services, extended benefits, and our air ambulance program. Thanks to Saskatchewan’s strong economy, we are in a position to invest significantly in our health system. There’s no question that is in badly need of renewal.

Our priorities in 2008 and 2009 include one of the largest capital renewal expenditures in the province’s history. We will begin much needed repairs on aging facilities and purchase new equipment for those facilities. Equally important is rebuilding our health care workforce. We will keep that promise through aggressive recruitment, expansion of training seats, and other initiatives. Our landmark agreement with the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses on recruitment and retention demonstrates that commitment.

Our other priorities include improving cancer care, expanded drug coverage, and more addiction beds. We’ve also provided funding to start work on a patient-first review of our health care system and on a long-term plan for capital and human resources. All of these priorities support our belief that patients must come first. We want our entire health care system to exemplify that belief.

I would like to highlight some of the key areas upon which we plan to focus. The ministry’s budget provides an additional $100 million to be used primarily to repair aging health care facilities. Another 32 million will be directed to capital projects currently under way in Regina, Saskatoon, and Humboldt. That includes 27 million to proceed with work on the new Saskatchewan Disease Control Laboratory. We’ve also set aside funding to plan for expansions of the Moose Jaw Union Hospital and for a maternal children’s hospital at the Royal University Hospital in Saskatoon.

Human resources account for a large portion of our budget. Over one-third of the additional money available this year will pay for increases in salaries, wages, and benefits to our health care profession, health care workers.

We are boosting spending on nursing recruitment and retention to 26 million, an increase of $20.7 million. This is over and above the $60 million in one-time funding that we have committed as part as the partnership agreement with the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses. We’ve also increased spending on physician recruitment and postgraduate training to almost $70 million, up more than $5 million from a year ago. This includes 17.6 million to open 24 new physician postgraduate training seats at the University of Saskatchewan’s College of Medicine.

The budget also provides 3.2 million from the Ministry of Advanced Education, Employment and Labour for 16 new undergraduate medical seats that will bring the total to 84. By the fiscal year 2010-2011, we’ll have 100 undergraduates and 120 postgraduate seats, filling another commitment by our government.

We will introduce a new fiscally responsible senior drug plan and a children’s drug plan. Starting July 1, medications listed under the provincial formulary will cost no more than $15 for a child 14 and under and seniors who earn less than about $64,000 a year. Our government is keeping its promises to expand the drug coverage. We have allotted 6.1 million to pay for new drugs under the provincial formulary.

We’re also following through on our commitment to improve cancer care. Our funding to the Saskatchewan Cancer Agency has increased by 10.7 million this year to more than $89 million. Almost 4 million of that will provide coverage for the colorectal cancer drug Avastin. In addition to investing in the Saskatchewan Cancer Agency, another $2.9 million will cover the HPV [human papillomavirus] vaccine to protect women with cervical cancer. We’re also investing 765,000 to pay for another drug that will help treat advanced kidney cancer.

Our 2008-2009 budget also includes 5.1 million to open 88 new addiction beds, and a 5.7 per cent increase in operating budget for our regional health authorities. RHAs [regional health authorities] will receive $2.29 billion this fiscal year. We have allocated 1.75 million to begin work on a patient-first review of our health care system and patient exit surveys.

We have also invested funding to allow long-term planning for capital, human resources, and seniors’ care. Our budget makes it clear that we are fully committed to providing Saskatchewan patients with the best health care services in the country. Already in a few short months we have accomplished a lot. Hundreds of new nurses have been hired to alleviate the severe shortage in the numbers for health regions. A new partnership agreement between the government and the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses is paving the way for a new climate of co-operation and further success recruiting and retaining of our nurses.

Coverage is now available for new cancer drugs. Hospitals across the province have received millions of dollars in safety and surgical equipment. And a new, secure birth certificate has been introduced. Swift Current Regional Hospital has become our first filmless hospital through introduction of the new picture archiving communication system or PACS [picture archiving and communication system]. New programs are under way or being planned for patients requiring hemodialysis, bariatric treatment, or colorectal cancer screening.

We are building on our accomplishments, guided by our priorities I’ve outlined today. The ministry senior staff and I will now be pleased to answer any questions that the committee may have. Thank you.