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HEALTH FUNDING FOR MORE SURGERIES, EQUIPMENT

Health Minister Len Taylor has announced plans to build a “day” surgery centre in Regina, one of several major health system initiatives aimed at improving public health care and reducing wait times for services.

Last month, Taylor and Federal Health Minister Tony Clement announced that in exchange for implementing a wait time guarantee for cardiac bypass surgery, Saskatchewan would receive nearly \$25 million in one-time federal health funding. The province is investing the funding in projects that will build surgical system capacity and help the province meet surgical wait time benchmarks.

Taylor said because the demand for surgery continues to rise, Saskatchewan must further expand surgical capacity. The decision to open a dedicated “day” surgery centre is based on the need to meet the future increase in demand for surgical services.

“The federal funding will support our goal of better serving patients and their families, by helping us improve access to health care and further reduce wait times for services,” Taylor said. “We are providing the resources necessary to transition to this new surgical facility, and will work closely with surgeons and other health providers as the planning process unfolds over the next two years.”

In recognition of the need to recruit and retain health professionals, the province established an aggressive health human resources strategy and recently provided \$25 million in funding to accelerate its plans. Taylor added that funding will assist in ensuring that Saskatchewan has the health professionals it needs, and that the surgical centre will be fully staffed when it opens.

The centre will be operated by Regina Qu’Appelle Health Region and is expected to cost approximately \$14 million to build and equip and will have three operating rooms and two procedure rooms. It will focus exclusively on “day” procedures, and when operating at full capacity will have the potential to complete about 5,000 cataract surgeries and 4,000 other procedures each year. These may include ear, nose and throat surgeries, joint arthroscopies, biopsies and hernia repairs.

“First and foremost, this new model will be patient-centred. Patients will receive their day procedures more quickly, in a centre specifically dedicated to day surgery and ambulatory procedures,” Taylor said. “There will be a reduced chance of surgeries being cancelled, since the centre will not handle emergency cases. We will be creating a patient-friendly environment.”

Over time, the centre will relieve pressure on Regina’s hospitals, and enable hospital operating rooms to do additional surgeries, many of them more complex surgeries such as cardiac and neurosurgery procedures, and hip and knee replacements. This will help shorten wait times for orthopaedic procedures, an area in which patients experience long waits across the country.

Approximately \$6 million of the federal funding will be used to upgrade the cardiac care system through capital improvements and equipment purchases. This may include enhancements to critical care and recovery facilities in Saskatoon, and the purchase of cardiosciences equipment for both Saskatoon and Regina.

Funding will also be provided to provincial and regional hospitals to purchase new equipment for operating and recovery rooms. In addition, as part of Saskatchewan’s commitment under the Patient Wait Time Guarantee Trust, the province will initiate a pilot project related to patient recourse. If a patient does not receive cardiac bypass surgery within a certain time frame, the province will arrange for them to receive it in another facility in Saskatchewan, or in another province.

The investments are in addition to the \$274 million funding increase for health spending announced in the recent provincial budget. Since September 2004, when First Ministers received a 10-year federal health funding commitment, Saskatchewan has invested \$41.2 million in surgical and diagnostic equipment.

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