

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
2008HEALTH0061-000826
May 29, 2008

Ministry of Health
New Zealand Ministry of Health

B.C. AND NEW ZEALAND SIGN HISTORIC HEALTH ARRANGEMENT

VICTORIA – An international agreement between the British Columbia Ministry of Health and the New Zealand Ministry of Health was signed today to further encourage the sharing of information and innovations in health service to maximize the health of British Columbians and New Zealanders.

“We are committed to learning from the lessons and experiences of other jurisdictions and nations as we maintain a world-class health-care system,” said Health Minister George Abbott. “New Zealand has taken steps in key areas that will be useful in developing British Columbia’s future strategies, such as improving access to family physicians for all citizens. When I had the opportunity to visit New Zealand in December 2007, one of the things that impressed me was the advances in primary health care, which is critical as it is the first point of contact for many patients.”

Both British Columbia and New Zealand are faced with challenges in hiring and keeping enough health professionals to meet future needs. There is mutual interest in improving the delivery of primary health care, reducing the incidence of chronic disease, and improving health status for indigenous peoples.

British Columbia recently introduced a bill governing the e-health framework and hopes to learn from significant e-health advancements already made by New Zealand at both the primary care and acute care levels of health services.

The Director-General of Health from New Zealand, Stephen McKernan, represented New Zealand’s Minister of Health in signing the arrangement at the British Columbia Legislature.

“New Zealand and B.C. both have a population of approximately four million and we are continuously striving to improve the delivery of health services and health outcomes to our urban, as well as our rural, populations,” said McKernan on behalf of New Zealand Minister of Health David Cunliffe. “The similarities of both jurisdictions makes it easier to share innovations and ideas.”

In addition to the arrangement signing, a delegation of New Zealand health-care leaders toured a number of sites in Fraser Health, Vancouver Coastal Health and Vancouver Island Health Authority to gain an understanding of some of the primary and chronic care initiatives underway in those health authorities. The four-day visit also included a day-long forum where participants exchanged information and strategies related to primary and chronic care strategies, reducing health inequalities, and the linkages between primary care and other parts of the health system.

Progress, results, and recommendations will be reported to the respective minister of health or that minister’s designate at least twice annually with a plan to for both jurisdictions to review the arrangement after five years.

In the spring session of the legislature, the Province introduced several bills or amendments that will further improve health care for British Columbians. These include, among others: amendments to the Medicare Protection Act that add the principle of sustainability to strengthen British Columbia's health system today and secure it for future generations; preventative measures such as banning smoking in vehicles when children are present; and banning the use of trans fats in the preparation of foods in schools, restaurants and food-service establishments by 2010.

For more information on recent legislation or for a copy of the health arrangement, please visit www.health.gov.bc.ca/cpa/mediasite/pdf/StrategicHealthArrangement.pdf.

Media contact: Michelle Stewart
Communications Director
Ministry of Health
250 812-5571 (cell)
250 952-1887 (media line)

For more information on government services or to subscribe to the Province's news feeds using RSS, visit the Province's website at www.gov.bc.ca.