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Ministry of Health Services

LAB REFORMS TO IMPROVE SERVICES, INCREASE EFFICIENCY

VICTORIA – The province is launching a new Provincial Laboratory Co-ordinating Office as part of a comprehensive initiative to renew lab service delivery and ensure better co-ordination of lab test results for patients, Health Services Minister Colin Hansen announced today.

“We made it clear in the Picture of Health, introducing a more co-ordinated, collaborative and cost-effective approach to lab services was a key step in modernizing B.C.’s health system and improving care for patients,” Hansen said.

Hansen said the new approach will build on the strengths of public and private sector lab service providers and will be led by the new co-ordinating office to work with health stakeholders through the transition period to ensure patient access and ensure high-quality lab service delivery.

“Our current approach to lab services is fragmented, with many labs working in isolation,” Hansen said. “For example, results of blood tests ordered by your family doctor in a community lab, may not be available to a physician in a hospital emergency room, leading to duplication and gaps in patient care. Providing an integrated approach will enhance physicians’ ability to provide prompt diagnosis and better care.”

The problem is heightened by the lack of a common lab information system connecting all of B.C.’s health providers. Currently, up to 27 different lab information systems are in operation and many are incompatible. As a result of these inefficiencies, B.C. taxpayers pay more per capita for lab services than any other province – 50 per cent per cent higher than the Canadian average.

The province will invest more than \$35 million during the next two years into strategic, provincial lab initiatives including the development of a quality information system that will be available to all providers. Other leading areas that will benefit include quality improvement and lab utilization management tools and activities, teaching and lab research, and provincial human resource planning and training that will assist B.C. in addressing the looming national shortage of lab professionals (both physicians and technologists) anticipated over the next decade.

B.C. currently has the highest use of lab service of any Canadian province, with total lab expenditures now reaching nearly \$500 million a year and growing by 35 per cent during the past five years. As a result of the greater efficiency and integration these reforms will provide, the new approach will help contain rising laboratory costs, protecting approximately \$70 million in health resources during the next two years which will be reinvested in other patient priorities.

“As a hospital-based laboratory physician, my primary concern is improving patient care through a more accountable and sustainable approach to lab medicine,” said Dr. Jim Cullen, medical director, Department of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine at Vancouver General Hospital. “While the patients of BC have been well-served by existing lab services, many studies have pointed to the need for improvement. We are very pleased the current government has the courage to move forward and address these long-standing issues for the benefit of B.C. patients.”

Hansen said the province will also integrate two separate funding sources for lab services to a single funding stream through the Ministry of Health Services. Currently, health authorities manage funding for lab services in hospitals, while outpatient lab services are billed through the Medical Service Plan.

Hansen said at least four major reviews during the past 10 years in the province have concluded reforms are necessary, but no action has been taken to date. B.C. remains the only province west of Quebec that has yet to implement changes in its approach to lab service delivery.

1 factsheet(s) attached.

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