
NEWS RELEASE

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Office of the Premier
Ministry of Health Services
Provincial Health Services Authority

NEW PROGRAM SUPPORTS B.C. FAMILIES WITH SICK KIDS

VANCOUVER – British Columbians with children needing medical care or treatment at BC Children’s Hospital now have increased access to travel and accommodation support, Premier Gordon Campbell announced today.

“As parents we need to be with our children when they are sick and need medical care,” said Premier Campbell. “The Province recognizes that a child’s illness may create a financial hardship for families, and this new program will help ease financial concerns so that parents can focus on the health and well-being of their family.”

The BC Family Residence Program will provide a per-night subsidy for each family with a child at BC Children’s Hospital for up to 30 days per stay. In addition, Hope Air and the Shriners of British Columbia and Yukon will each receive annual grants of \$500,000 to build on existing ground and air transportation assistance programs.

In total, \$13 million has been earmarked in Budget 2010 for expanded travel and accommodation programs. Of that, \$7.4 million has been budgeted for this program for the 2010/11 fiscal year. The Province is looking at options for future expansions of the program, including providing travel and accommodation assistance for other regional centres.

Any family with permanent residency in B.C. and Medical Services Plan coverage is eligible to receive accommodation assistance if their child requires medical care at BC Children’s Hospital. The program includes support for premature babies and newborns with other health concerns. Families must receive confirmation of eligibility from a medical or community service professional and reside outside the Metro Vancouver area.

Program oversight and funding for the BC Family Residence Program, which began on April 1, will be the responsibility of the Provincial Health Services Authority (PHSA) and the accommodation component of the program will be administered by Variety – The Children’s Charity of British Columbia, on behalf of PHSA and the Ministry of Health Services.

The Province will also provide annual funding to Hope Air and the Shriners of British Columbia and Yukon to support their existing medical travel programs for British Columbians. The Ministry of Health Services already provides \$7.1 million annually for the Travel Assistance Program across British Columbia and an additional \$6 million annually to support regional Health Connections rural transportation programs.

“Each year, more than 5,200 patients travel to BC Children’s Hospital for medical care from communities across British Columbia,” said PHSA board chair, Wynne Powell. “This new program recognizes the importance of providing accessible health care services for British Columbians, no matter where in the province they live.”

Variety – The Children’s Charity is a non-profit charitable organization dedicated to raising funds and distributing grants throughout British Columbia to inspire hope, enrich lives, and build a better future for children who have special needs.

“We are happy to be administering this program for the government. We know that keeping families together at a time of difficulty can make a world of difference to a child’s recovery,” said Barbie Hislop, executive director of Variety – The Children’s Charity. “This new program allows for our donor dollars to go even further as it will now cover those costs associated with allowing parents to be with their children receiving medical care away from home. Variety will now be able to increase spending in other areas. We are grateful for that chance.”

Hope Air is a national, not-for-profit charitable organization that helps provide air transportation to and from specialized medical treatment or diagnostic centres for people who cannot afford the cost. Hope Air uses empty or donated seats on existing corporate, personal and commercial flights. In 2009, 38 per cent of all Hope Air flights were provided to B.C. residents, the highest of any province, and more than half of those flights were for children.

“Since 1986, Hope Air has arranged thousands of flights for B.C. residents, many of them children,” said Douglas Keller-Hobson, executive director of Hope Air. “We appreciate the continued and generous support of the Province. It is through support like this that we can continue helping British Columbians connect with the medical services they require.”

The Shriners Care Cruiser Program provides a free transportation service for families with seriously ill children on specially-equipped coaches. The program is open to B.C. children receiving treatment at any Shriners Hospital for children, BC Children’s Hospital, BC Women’s Hospital and Sunny Hill Hospital. Currently Shriners’ buses provide service from departure points across the province including Cache Creek, 100 Mile House, Prince George, Merritt, Kamloops, Vernon, Kelowna and Castlegar.

“The new program and added financial support from the Province support our mission of providing the safest and best medical transportation services to children and will provide us with the ability to upgrade our motor coach fleet,” said Jim Harrison, executive director of the Shriners of B.C. and Yukon. “Since 2001, our Care Cruisers have travelled over two million kilometres, transporting more than 22,000 patients and their escorts to hospitals around the province and the Pacific Northwest for treatment.”

The BC Family Residence Program supports the work of the Ministry of Health Services’ Travel Assistance Program, a corporate partnership between the ministry and private transportation carriers, who agree to waive or discount their regular fees for eligible B.C. residents who must travel within the province for non-emergency medical specialist services not available in their own community.

For more information on the BC Family Residence Program and a complete listing of eligibility criteria, please contact the Health and Seniors Information Line at 1-800-465-4911 or visit <http://www.bcfamilyresidence.gov.bc.ca/>.

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