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Ministry of Health Services

### **FAIR PHARMACARE IMPROVES ACCESS FOR B.C. FAMILIES**

VICTORIA – Low-income B.C. families will pay less for eligible prescription drugs under the province’s new Fair PharmaCare program, Health Services Minister Colin Hansen announced today.

“We’re modernizing PharmaCare and ensuring financial assistance is available to British Columbians who need it most,” said Hansen. “Under the old approach, many B.C. families with low incomes have been paying more for their prescription drugs than those with higher incomes – and that’s not fair.”

Under the Fair PharmaCare program, about 280,000 low-income B.C. families and seniors who face high prescription drug costs will pay less.

Fair PharmaCare, which takes effect May 1, combines the existing major PharmaCare plans – the universal plan and the seniors’ plan – into one new program, with access based on families’ ability to pay. The lower a family’s income, the more financial assistance government will provide. With these changes, British Columbia will provide the second most generous prescription drug coverage in the country.

“In fact, 84 per cent of all B.C. families will pay the same or less for their prescription drug costs under Fair PharmaCare,” said Hansen. “This new program makes PharmaCare more equitable for British Columbians and sustainable for the future.”

“We are heartened by today’s announcement because it will benefit ALS patients with lower incomes,” said Sue Lewis-O’Halloran, executive director of the ALS Society. “Anything that will relieve the enormous burden imposed by this disease is a positive step.”

For the first time, young families with lower incomes will be supported with their drug costs. To protect seniors and those who will turn 65 soon, financial assistance will be available under a seniors’ Fair PharmaCare program.

“We’ve acted on the recommendations of seniors’ groups and raised the income threshold higher than originally planned to ensure they are protected from high drug costs,” Hansen said.

Some PharmaCare plans will remain unchanged. Included are those offering special assistance for British Columbians with mental illnesses or who need palliative drugs; those on income assistance, in long-term care facilities or coping with cystic fibrosis; and children with severe disabilities registered with the at home program of the Ministry of Children and Family Development.

In addition, drug coverage already in place for cancer, transplant and renal patients, as well as those with HIV/AIDS, will remain the same.

To monitor the impact of the new program, the Centre for Health Services and Policy Research at the University of British Columbia will conduct an independent evaluation of Fair PharmaCare.

“The B.C. Pharmacy Association believes these new PharmaCare changes are the first of many useful health-care reforms that will benefit all British Columbians,” said Ken Foreman, deputy CEO and director of professional services for the association. “Clearly we are pleased to be working alongside government to initiate and implement the breadth and scope of these advances.”

PharmaCare is the fastest growing part of B.C.’s health-care budget. PharmaCare costs have increased by about 147 per cent over the last decade in B.C. and are projected to grow 487 per cent over the next two decades.

To use the new Fair PharmaCare program, B.C. families will need to register to be eligible for financial assistance. For more information about the program and how to register, visit our Web site at [www.gov.bc.ca](http://www.gov.bc.ca), or call toll-free in B.C. 1-800-387-4977.

2 backgrounder(s) attached.

Visit the province's Web site at <http://www.gov.bc.ca/> for online information and services.

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