
NEWS RELEASE

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Fraser Health

LOWER MAINLAND PARTNERSHIP IMPROVES PATIENT ACCESS

VANCOUVER – Improved access to services and faster care is the goal behind a series of innovative pilot projects announced today by Health Services Minister George Abbott that are now underway in British Columbia’s two largest health authorities.

Fraser Health (FH) and Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH) have collaborated on a series of pilot programs as part of a two-year \$75-million Lower Mainland Innovation and Integration Fund to encourage new patient-focused funding models that will support patient access – a government initiative announced in the 2008 throne speech.

“Through investment and innovation we are improving access to health services across the province,” said Abbott. “We introduced the Lower Mainland Innovation and Integration Fund to drive projects that will provide more services and speed up access to health care.”

Among the initiatives approved to proceed across Vancouver Coastal Health and Fraser Health are:

- **MRI capacity:** Through a centralized scheduling and booking system, and more efficient use of MRI image time, Vancouver Coastal Health and Fraser Health aim to perform as many as 18,000 new MRI exams across the Lower Mainland at a lower cost.
- **The Providence Health Care distal extremity surgical project:** By implementing a centralized referral service, the project is targeting a major reduction in wait lists of 60 to 70 per cent for people seeking a referral for foot, ankle, hand, and wrist (distal) surgery.
- **Spinal surgery expansion:** Wait times for spinal surgery are projected to be cut as much as 50 per cent by coordinating spinal surgery resources across the Lower Mainland for the first time.
- **The Lower Mainland colonoscopy initiative:** Introducing the innovative “swing room” concept at several hospitals as well as new scheduling practices and staffing configurations, Vancouver Coastal Health and Fraser Health hope to perform several thousand more colonoscopies for patients - leading to shorter wait times and wait lists.

The two health authorities, who serve over 60 per cent of BC’s population as well as providing many specialized services to the entire province, solicited creative and entrepreneurial proposals from physicians, staff and others in April 2008. That call for proposals resulted in over 500 submissions containing a wealth of ideas on improvements, changes, and increases in the provision of health care services. From these, the LMIF steering committee approved eight projects to proceed with a total budget commitment of around \$20 million.

“The commitment and creativity of our health professionals are resulting in tangible benefits for patients from across the Lower Mainland, and perhaps ultimately for people from across the province,” said Dr. Nigel Murray, president and CEO of Fraser Health. “By working collaboratively, our health authorities are improving services for patients today and also developing new, more sustainable ways to provide care to our rapidly-growing communities.”

While Vancouver Coastal Health and Fraser Health already cooperate in many ways on a daily basis, the two health authorities see the Lower Mainland Innovation and Integration Fund as another platform from which to launch new ideas and find further efficiencies.

“We believe significant opportunities exist to improve the speed and quality of care our patients receive across the Lower Mainland,” said Ida Goodreau, president and CEO of Vancouver Coastal Health. “In some cases we are expecting a 50 per cent or better improvement in access and wait times. That is a significant step ahead in how we use our resources to provide services and demonstrates just what can be achieved by working together.”

1 backgrounder(s) attached.

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