



## News Release

### “Canadianize” Nunavut health care, Minister says

**IQALUIT, Nunavut (April 8, 2002)** -- Nunavummiut are waiting to become part of a health care system that provides fair and equal access to services, Health and Social Services Minister Ed Picco told a national health commission today.

“While the debate in southern Canada is about better levels of service, the question for us in Nunavut is how to achieve even basic levels,” Minister Picco told Commissioner Roy Romanow during the Iqaluit phase of the Commission on the Future of Health Care in Canada.

“We need to ‘Canadianize’ Nunavut health care so that it is at least comparable to what is already in place in most parts of Canada. While Iqaluit has a hospital, doctors and clinics, that is not the reality in most of the territory’s communities where there may be only one nurse,” Minister Picco said.

Reiterating the message that Premier Paul Okalik delivered at the recent premiers’ conference on health in Vancouver, Minister Picco stated, “Our health care infrastructure is very basic, even here in Iqaluit. We do not compare favourably with southern centres – even with those in most remote or rural areas. Major renovations and expansions are needed, especially in light of the fact we have one of the highest population growth rates in Canada.”

Moreover, health care costs are higher in Nunavut than elsewhere because of its vastness and remoteness, Minister Picco said. “We have about 29,000 people. They occupy one-fifth of Canada. We span three time zones. Much of our hospital care is provided in southern cities and we spend \$30 million a year on medical air travel. One of every eight dollars in our health care budget goes to jet fuel.”

Nunavut is managing its health budget responsibly, but this is not enough to build a health care system with acceptable service levels comparable to elsewhere, the Minister said, adding: “Nunavut requires unique fiscal consideration. Ongoing and creative partnerships with the Government of Canada will be necessary for Nunavut to reach this goal.

“Achieving national standards in health care is not about per capita spending, but about spending what is needed so that we can achieve those standards, even in remote communities such as those of Nunavut,” Minister Picco told the commission.

One key to improving access to services in those communities is increased broadband, the Minister said. “Nunavut’s only highway is the information highway. More satellite transponder space would allow expansion of telehealth. We need telecommunications to reduce the need to medivac people to southern centres,” the Minister said.

Pointing out that 85 per cent of Nunavut’s population is Inuit, Minister Picco said: “The federal government has a longstanding and special relationship with the Inuit. We believe the federal government has fiscal, historical and constitutional responsibilities for aboriginal people throughout Canada, including the Inuit of Nunavut.

“We strongly recommend the Government of Canada accept and discharge its responsibility to 85 per cent of the population of Nunavut. In turn, we are willing and eager to work collaboratively with the federal government to address the health needs of all Nunavummiut,” the Minister told the hearing.

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