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PILOT PROJECT TO CONNECT MANITOBANS WITH AFTER-HOURS CARE

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Province's Electronic Health Record Initiative On Track: Ministers

A \$6-million pilot project will make innovative use of information technology to connect Manitobans with primary health care after regular clinic hours and support patients with chronic conditions in managing their own care needs, Health Minister Theresa Oswald announced today.

“This new pilot project will allow us to use new technology to help Manitobans with non-urgent health concerns get the help they need after regular clinic hours,” Oswald said. “This initiative will reduce the number of trips people need to make to their doctor or to emergency rooms, something that will be especially advantageous in rural and remote areas.”

The new pilot project, called CareLink, will make patients’ journeys through the health-care system more seamless, ensuring patients can call their doctor’s office at any time and get the help they need, Oswald said. After hours, calls to participating primary-care clinics will be automatically routed through the award-winning Health Links–Info Santé provincial call centre to ensure patients can have health concerns addressed even outside of local clinic hours. The project will ensure after-hours assistance provided by Health Links–Info Santé is shared with the patient’s primary physician.

The CareLink project will also focus on patients with chronic diseases such as congestive heart failure, using Health Links–Info Santé and Telehealth videoconferencing to support patients in managing their own care needs without having to travel to a doctor’s office or hospital.

“This pilot will help patients with chronic conditions manage their own health with the help of a registered nurse and other supports,” noted Healthy Living Minister Kerri Irvin Ross. “Patients will get personalized help over the phone with monitoring important symptoms, medications and other care needs.”

The CareLink pilot builds on Manitoba eHealth's current work of developing an electronic health-record system in the province. Announced in April 2007, the five-year, \$150-million plan to implement electronic health records (EHR) for every Manitoban is well underway. The electronic health record is a secure and private record of key medical history and care for each Manitoban and will be available across the province to authorized health-care providers.

"Manitobans' medical records will virtually travel with them anywhere in the province, meaning that health-care providers will have immediate access to up-to-date information about patients' medication histories, laboratory results and diagnostic images," Oswald said.

Manitoba's progress in implementing the electronic health record is being supported by Canada Health Infoway (Infoway), an independent, not-for-profit organization funded by the federal government. Infoway jointly invests with every province and territory to accelerate the development and adoption of electronic health-record projects in Canada. Infoway has allocated \$56.3 million to Manitoba's EHR to date, as well as \$4.5 million in funding support for the CareLink pilot project announced today.

"Manitoba continues to make terrific progress in its efforts to modernize the information flow in its health-care system," said Richard Alvarez, president and CEO, Canada Health Infoway. "Manitobans are well on their way toward having their health information move with them throughout the health-care system – an important change that will improve patient care, create efficiencies and save money."