

New long-term care facilities to be built in Sask.

BY ANNE KYLE, LEADER-POST FEBRUARY 3, 2009

REGINA -- The provincial government is investing \$152.8 million in provincial infrastructure money to replace 13 crumbling, outdated long-term care facilities throughout Saskatchewan.

"Today's announcement means that high-priority capital projects will move ahead more quickly than anticipated," Health Minister Don McMorris told reporters on Tuesday.

Many of the existing facilities were never designed for the level of care they were being asked to deliver, McMorris added, citing examples of antiquated plumbing, the lack of air-conditioning and wheelchair accessibility to washrooms, and safety concerns.

"Making sure that our health facilities are up-to-date and meeting today's building standards is incredibly important to ensure the safety and comfort of residents and health-care providers," he said.

More than 540 long-term care residents will benefit from new long-term facilities being constructed in the communities of: Maple Creek (48 long-term care beds), Rosetown (47), Kerrobert (36), Biggar (59), Tisdale (33), Kelvington (46), Meadow Lake (55), Prince Albert (50), Shellbrook (34), Watrous (35), Redvers (24), Kipling (28), and Radville (52).

Planning for these projects has already begun in the hopes construction can be completed by the end of 2010. Some of the facilities will be stand-alone, while other long-term bed facilities will be either additions to existing health-care centres or part of new integrated long-term and acute-care centres.

"We are looking at an integrated facility for (Maple Creek). Right now we are operating two facilities, we are leasing another and we have just basically condemned a third," said Cypress Health Region CEO Jim Hornell.

"We've had to move staff out of the community health services building into the hospital which shows you how pressed we are for services. This way we will be able to have all of our services under one roof (and build in administrative efficiencies) and I think that is a real plus for that community. It is a good news story, and it is more than just long-term care," Hornell said.

"This is about enhancing services. The community is growing and we want to look at what the projection for the population is going to be and see exactly what we need."

The province will fund 65 per cent of the projects with the health regions contributing the remainder. The regions will raise the money through community and health foundation fundraising and special municipal levies.

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The infrastructure funding is in addition to the \$198 million already announced for health capital projects this fiscal year.

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