

**LETTER TO THE EDITOR****November 28, 2000**

Dear Editor,

This letter responds to your editorial "Last-minute help" on November 28, about the issue of solvent addiction in remote Innu communities of Labrador. Your position that the Government of Canada has ignored this problem for years is incorrect. The Government of Canada has been working with Innu communities since 1993 to put sustainable, long-term solutions in place.

In the short term, there are immediate social needs that need to be met. Today, our first and foremost priority is the health and safety of the children and of their families. To this end, Health Canada has been working with Innu leaders and the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to arrange treatment for the children of Sheshatshui and Davis Inlet. Earlier this year, Health Canada responded to a request from Chief Rich of Sheshatshui with a commitment for \$100,000 in interim funding for a family residential treatment program for that community.

In May, a \$1.5 million new solvent treatment centre opened in Sheshatshui. It is funded by Health Canada as part of a national network of similar facilities. The centre is a twelve-bed facility which provides a six-month detoxification and solvent abuse treatment program. Treatment needs beyond the current capacity of this centre may be met by our ten solvent treatment centres located across Canada where there are a total of 126 beds.

Health Canada considers the issue of solvent addiction in Sheshatshui and Davis Inlet to be very serious and is working with federal and provincial partners to apply additional resources where they will yield the greatest benefit. Health Canada provides about \$1 million per year to Davis Inlet for ongoing health programs in the community such as community health nursing, health promotion, addictions prevention, and patient transportation. Over the past eight years, Health Canada has provided over \$2.5 million, beyond this ongoing funding, to Davis Inlet for targeted programs to address the special needs of this community. These needs include programs that support culturally-appropriate, family-based country treatment, and training for community-based workers. This year, an additional \$300,000 in targeted funding was made available to Davis Inlet to meet special needs such as a Healing Coordinator; youth treatment camps; adult country treatment camps and sexual abuse training for staff.

The effects of childhood substance addiction are tragic. However, true, long-term solutions will not happen overnight and if these solutions are to be sustainable they must involve families and their communities. Health Canada considers the social issues of the Innu very seriously. In the short term, we are acting to protect the health and safety of children. In the long term, we are prepared to work in partnership with these communities to support efforts to recover their self-determination and ongoing health. The most lasting and viable solutions will be those that are rooted in the Innu communities of Labrador.

Sincerely,

Ian Potter  
Assistant Deputy Minister  
First Nations and Inuit Health Branch  
Health Canada