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**Government Response  
Senate Question to Senator  
March 13, 2001**

**Davis Inlet Treatment Program for Native Children  
Honourable Bill Rompkey**

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The Government of Canada would like to take this opportunity to highlight some of the inroads we are making in the community of Davis Inlet and for the Innu living there. Health Canada is well aware of the serious health problems facing Aboriginal people in Canada. However, Health Canada is convinced that by working together, we can find ways to address these problems.

The Government of Canada considers the issue of solvent addiction in Davis Inlet to be very serious. The Government has listened to Canadians from across this country who are worried about the children of Davis Inlet. We want to reassure them, and the honourable senators, that our main concern is also the health and safety of the Innu children, and we are working hard to ensure their situation improves.

Health Canada staff are in frequent contact with community leaders in Davis Inlet, to assist in the planning and funding of programs and services aimed at improving health and healing in that community.

Health Canada provides about \$1 million per year to Davis Inlet for ongoing health programs. These community-centered programs include: health promotion, community health nursing, addictions prevention, and patient transportation. In addition, Health Canada provides the Labrador Innu with benefits such as dental care and prescription drugs. The Province of Newfoundland provides services to Davis Inlet such as treatment nursing and a range of social services.

Beyond this ongoing funding, since 1992/93 Health Canada has provided over \$2 million to Davis Inlet for targeted programs to address the special needs of the community. Among other things, this funding supports culturally-appropriate, family-based country treatment, and training for community-based workers. Country treatment is an approach to family treatment based on Innu culture and strongly supported by the Innu communities. Family treatment takes place in a country camp setting where the Innu have traditionally sought healing from the land that has supported them for centuries.

In recognition of the large number of at-risk children in the Innu communities of Labrador, a new solvent treatment centre for adolescents is being funded by Health Canada in the community of Sheshatshiu. The centre opened in May 2000 and supports the needs of at-risk youth in Davis Inlet, Sheshatshiu and other Aboriginal communities in Labrador. In addition, this centre serves

as part of the network of solvent treatment centres funded by Health Canada to meet the needs of Aboriginal people throughout Canada. The Sheshatshiu centre is a twelve-bed facility, providing a six-month detoxification and solvent abuse treatment program.

On December 13, 2000, along with Chief Simeon Tshakapesh of Davis Inlet, Health Canada announced an agreement with the Innu of Davis Inlet.

Health Canada is committed to support the Mushuau Innu and the provincial government in seeing that the affected children and their families are appropriately assessed and treated, including both short and long term treatment and prevention programs.

The Government of Canada acknowledged that an agreement was required, in consultation with the Province, on an appropriate treatment plan for the affected children, as soon as possible.

In earlier conversations that Industry Canada had with the Innu of Sheshatshiu, a commitment was made for the development of a regional detoxification centre. As part of the December 13<sup>th</sup> announcement, this regional detoxification centre would be located in close proximity to appropriate medical facilities in Labrador which have the necessary staff and programming resources.

In the meantime, over 30 at-risk children of Davis Inlet are being maintained in a safe and protective environment at a centre set up by the provincial government in St. John's. They are receiving medical and psycho-social assessments and the detoxification treatment they need. Health Canada is in discussion presently about possible next steps for these children once they complete assessment and detoxification treatment. Plans are currently being developed jointly by federal and provincial officials and Mushuau Innu for both a youth treatment and adult treatment program leading in the new year to a family centre treatment program for the at-risk youth and families.

Health Canada's long term goal, in partnership with the province is to develop a culturally-appropriate, family-centred treatment plan for both parents and children. The objective is that the children who need to leave their community for treatment be reintegrated into a safe and nurturing family and community setting when they return to their homes. In addition, targeted funding of \$300,000 was offered for the community's special needs such as a healing coordinator, crisis intervention and family-oriented culturally-appropriate addictions treatment.

The Government of Canada is also looking at other necessary long-term initiatives that fall within the mandate of Health Canada that will help in repairing the cultural and social fabric of this community.

In an effort to ensure that we act on these commitments in a timely manner, Health Canada has agreed to provide all the necessary human and financial resources as agreed with the Mushuau Innu. Health Canada immediately started working with the province of Newfoundland and Labrador and the Innu of Davis Inlet to assess children at risk and have them taken for treatment in St. John's in the interim.

The complexities of the problems in Davis Inlet mean that solutions will not be found overnight. The Innu have experienced the complete transformation of their traditional way of life within one generation. It will take time and effort to help heal this community.

The Government of Canada will continue to encourage a holistic, culturally-appropriate approach to healing in Davis Inlet with the input and assistance of provincial partners and the Innu.