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

**Davis Inlet Treatment Program for Native Children**

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**Introduction:**

Health Canada is well aware of the serious health issues faced by Aboriginal people in Canada and is making inroads in the Innu communities of Davis Inlet and Sheshatshiu. Health Canada is convinced that by working together, we will find ways to address the problems that are front and center today.

The Innu community of Davis Inlet has been plagued by abnormally high solvent abuse rates for many years and more recently Sheshatshiu has been plagued with the same problem. Over the past year, the incidence of gas-sniffing has increased to alarming proportions, especially among the younger children. Health Canada has put in place a number of services as well as funding to address this issue.

In 1993, following a gas-sniffing-related crisis, Health Canada began to fund programming targeted to the special needs of the Mushuau Innu (ie. the residents of Davis Inlet). Likewise, following extended consultations and negotiations, the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Development received authority and funding to relocate the community to a new site in Sango Pond.

Health Canada funding for Sheshatshiu ( population 1,072) is in excess of \$1.8 million dollars for ongoing programs such as public health, addictions, prevention and other healing programs and for operating costs for the recently opened 12 bed solvent treatment centre in the community. In the health sector, the Province supplements these services with treatment nursing and subsidizes the cost of medical transportation to its hospital on the island.

Health Canada funding for Davis Inlet (population 598) for the same ongoing programs as Sheshatshiu is approximately \$1 million. 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 Province's health service delivery role here is the same as in Sheshathiu.

On November 26, 2000, Industry Minister Brian Tobin, Newfoundland Premier Beaton Tulk, Ernest McLean, Newfoundland Minister responsible for Labrador, Lawrence O'Brien, Labrador, M.P., Wally Anderson, M.H.A. for Labrador/Torngat Mountains, Innu Nation President Peter Penashue and Chief Paul Rich, Sheshatshiu, met with federal, provincial and band officials in Goose Bay to explore long and short term solutions to the social and cultural problems facing the Innu children of Sheshatshiu.

They agreed, among other things that the first priority in the situation was for the protection and well-being of the children affected by the gas sniffing; that federal and provincial officials would work closely together with the community to put in place appropriate treatment options as quickly as possible and to commit the necessary resources; that the Government of Canada would register the Innu under the Indian Act; that provincial and regional officials would establish a regional de-toxification centre in Labrador; and that family-centered treatment programs would be developed for the Innu.

**A meeting was held on December 11, 2000 between Chief Simeon Tshakapesh, Health Minister Allan Rock and Industry Minister Brian Tobin to address children and youth at risk in Davis Inlet. On December 13<sup>th</sup>, it was announced that an agreement of commitments was reached. Under the agreement, Health Canada has committed as top priority to support the Mushuau Innu and the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador in securing the safety and appropriate short and long treatment of the affected children in Davis Inlet.**

The agreement outlines the following:

- **Health Canada is committed to working cooperatively and on an urgent basis with the Mushuau Innu**
- **to reach agreement, in consultation with the Province, on an appropriate treatment plan for the affected children as soon as possible**
- **to ensure, in cooperation with the Province, that the previously committed regional detoxification center is located in close proximity and access to appropriate medical facilities with necessary staff and programming resources in Labrador**
- **to develop, in cooperation with the province, a culturally appropriate family-centered treatment plan for both parents and children, so that children who need to leave for treatment can be reintegrated into a safe and nurturing family and community setting**
- **to provide, in cooperation with Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, a social services coordinator to coordinate activities between federal, provincial and Innu agencies at Davis Inlet**
- **to explore other necessary long-term initiatives in the mandate of Health Canada to repair the cultural and social fabric of the communities of Davis Inlet and Natuashish**
- **Health Canada is committed to providing all necessary human and financial resources as agreed with the Mushuau Innu including direct financial resources to ensure timely implementation of the commitments.**

The main concern remains ensuring the health and safety of the Innu children and working hard to ensure their situation improves.

The recent growth in the incidence of solvent abuse has led Health Canada to take the following steps:

**Action:**

Sheshatshiu

In December 2000, 19 children were apprehended by Newfoundland social workers and were taken to facilities in Goose Bay. These individuals have been through a period of detoxification and medical, addictions and psycho-social assessment and treatment plans have been developed for each individual. Only six remain at the facilities in Goose Bay and they soon will be returned to their community for the next steps in their treatment (the other 13 are in treatment facilities, foster-care or in country treatment programs).

With funding provided by Health Canada, an adult addictions day program and an outreach program have been instituted within the community. The adult day program is intended to begin building skills among the parents so their children can be re-integrated into the family in the near future. The results of the program have been exceptional for those involved, with the outcome being an elimination of family/domestic violence, voluntary support groups established by the participants and a commitment by participants to continue this process and help others.

The longer-term family-centered treatment program promised in the agreement of November 26, 2000 has been developed by Sheshatshiu in consultation with Health Canada and provincial officials and Health Canada has agreed to begin funding the program in April 2001.

As a result of interventions to date there are no signs of children gas-sniffing within the community at present.

Davis Inlet

As of March 30, 32 at risk children from Davis Inlet have been assessed at the Grace facility in St. John's, Newfoundland. They too have been through a period of medical, addictions and psycho-social assessment as well as a program of detoxification. In addition, recommendations for individual treatment plans have been completed by a clinical assessment team.

On March 29, 2001 at a meeting in St. John's, representatives of the Mushuau Innu, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador and Health Canada agreed on a short-term plan for the treatment of the children and a strategy for developing a long-term treatment plan. In addition, at this and at a previous meeting, agreement was reached on a number of related issues such as assessment and treatment for a group of young adults still in the community and an in-country mobile treatment program for older adults of Davis Inlet, and in particular the parents of the affected children.

**Planned Action:**

The short-term treatment plan identifies treatment options relative to each child's assessed level of risk.

- ▶ High risk children will be placed within a matter of days into a First Nations-operated solvent abuse treatment center, funded by Health Canada.
- ▶ Medium risk children will be placed within a matter of weeks into alternate living arrangements incorporating appropriate treatment. This will be done in Goose Bay.
- ▶ Low risk children will be placed in an Innu-operated Youth Country Treatment Program within a matter of weeks. This type of program, which has been funded by Health Canada since 1993, addresses addictions issues directly while focusing on subjects that promote healing, especially Innu culture and way of life.

#### The General Situation

Health Canada and Newfoundland Health and Community Services have agreed on how the two departments will cost-share expenditures incurred during the 2000/01 fiscal year and where the lead role will reside for support of future healing activities for the Mushuau Innu.

In January 2001, Health Canada opened an office in Goose Bay, Labrador specifically to work with the two Innu communities. By having staff in close proximity to the Innu we hope to optimize the partnership that has been established and to provide high quality service to the two communities. As well, this office has been able to establish close working relationships with other government departments in the Happy Valley-Goose Bay area on a wide range of issues important to the overall healing strategy.

Health Canada, with other federal departments, is looking at other necessary long-term initiatives that will help in repairing the cultural and social fabric of these communities. The complexities of the problems in these communities 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 these communities. The Government of Canada will continue to encourage a holistic, culturally-appropriate approach to healing in Davis Inlet and Sheshatshiu with the input and assistance of provincial partners and the Innu.