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## AHS and partners create Newcomer Health Group

*Aims to educate local Bhutanese community about health care and services*

LETHBRIDGE – The Bhutanese refugee community in Lethbridge — one of the largest in Canada — is learning about healthy living and how to access vital health care services through a Newcomer Health Group developed with Alberta Health Services (AHS).

The partnership between local physicians and health providers, Lethbridge Family Services – Immigrant Services, and the local community from the Himalayan South Asian country was developed to address common health challenges faced by the more than 1,000 Bhutanese refugees now living in the city.

“This partnership is a testament to the amazing people who work in our health care system and in our communities,” says Health Minister Sarah Hoffman. “Because of the Newcomer Health Group, people from the Bhutanese community will face fewer barriers to accessing the health care services they need.”

Sean Chilton, Chief Zone Officer of AHS South Zone, points out similar work is being done to support other populations throughout the zone.

“We’re working with diverse populations to support a Patient First Strategy that engages patients as full partners in their health care and is focused on meeting their individual health needs,” says Chilton.

“This is one of many initiatives focused on supporting a variety of cultures within the zone. Enabling Albertans to become active participants in all aspects of their care improves their health and wellness, and ensures they can access the care they need when they need it.”

A health needs assessment of the Bhutanese population was conducted last year and identified health literacy and communications as two high-priority areas.

“Health literacy refers to an individual’s ability to understand and use information to make informed choices about their health care,” says Stasha Donahue, AHS Diversity and Self-Management Co-ordinator and a Newcomer Health Group facilitator.

“Canadian newcomers often struggle with language, as well as cultural, economic, education, employment and other barriers, all of which impact their ability to manage health conditions and their overall well-being.”

The Newcomer Health Group aims to address common health concerns and is working with translators to customize health resources for the roughly 1,000 Bhutanese refugees in Lethbridge.

Canada's Food Guide has been translated into Nepali and has been adapted to better reflect Bhutanese choices. Medication labels are also being translated and will incorporate more visual cues and pictures to assist in understanding. Mental health information about anxiety and depression, and information about seniors' services, is also being customized, making it easier for newcomers to use and understand.

Manoj Dhakal, a registered nurse working with AHS Home Care, was born in Bhutan and moved to Canada in 2008. He knows what it's like to adapt to a new culture and is happy to be a part of the newcomer health group and for the opportunity to help others adjust.

"I love working with seniors," says Dhakal, 37. "I provide interpretation and explain the Canadian health care system. Bhutanese seniors are not familiar with a preventive and health promotion model of care. Many seniors don't believe in Western treatment and prefer more traditional, spiritual treatments. By the time they approach a physician, it can be too late."

Dr. Eric Bly of Campbell Clinic West joined the Newcomer Health Group to better support his patients, many of whom are Bhutanese.

"Through this work, I'm learning how to help people access specialty services, such as interpreters and additional community supports," says Dr. Bly.

Lethbridge Family Services is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to providing community-based support services to individuals and families; Immigrant Services is a department within the organization devoted to helping recently immigrated newcomers settle into the community.

Alberta Health Services is the provincial health authority responsible for planning and delivering health supports and services for more than four million adults and children living in Alberta. Its mission is to provide a patient-focused, quality health system that is accessible and sustainable for all Albertans.

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