

May 20, 2010

1,400 additional cataract surgeries to be provided *Up to 120 more corneal transplants also offered*

Alberta Health Services (AHS) will fund an additional 1,400 cataract surgeries over the next four months, and up to an additional 120 corneal transplants this year, to provide greater access for necessary eye surgeries and to reduce wait lists.

These surgeries are in addition to 2,140 more cataract surgeries funded earlier this year for Albertans, and are over and above the 35,000 eye-related surgeries already being funded in this year's budget.

"Today's announcement emphasizes our ongoing commitment to speed up access to priority health services," said Minister of Health and Wellness Gene Zwozdesky. "We are working collaboratively with AHS and with ophthalmologic surgeons and facility owners to improve access, to reduce wait times, and to shorten wait lists."

The 1,400 additional cataract surgeries are included in an *Expression of Interest* document distributed to cataract service providers today. Providers have been asked to respond within two weeks. Contracts will be awarded to all approved, accredited facilities interested in providing the service within the guidelines stipulated and with the understanding that the surgeries will be completed by September 30, 2010.

Of the 1,400 additional cataract procedures, 1,000 will be done in Calgary where wait-lists are the longest. They will be performed by approved providers in non-hospital surgical facilities in Calgary. Another 300 will be performed at non-hospital surgical facilities in Edmonton; and 100 at the Royal Alexandra Hospital in Edmonton, as agreed to. Up to 120 additional corneal transplants will be completed this year in Calgary, subject to the availability of donor tissue. (Up to 150 corneal transplants are already scheduled for Edmonton, again, subject to availability of donor tissue.)

The total cost of these additional cataract and corneal procedures is approximately \$2 million, including surgeons' fees, anesthetists' fees, lens' costs and other related costs. The surgeries are being funded out of AHS' operating budget and are part of the 5-year Funding Plan from the Government of Alberta.

"We have identified priority areas where we are increasing surgeries and improving access," said AHS President and Chief Executive Officer Dr. Stephen Duckett. "The additional cataract surgeries are part of a larger strategy to increase our overall surgical capacity and address wait times for priority procedures."

Earlier this spring, AHS launched a broad first surgical blitz that resulted in an additional 2,250 surgeries and non-surgical procedures, including urgent cancer surgery, orthopedic surgery, gynecology, neurosurgery, heart surgery and cataract surgery. More than 3,600 additional MRI and CT scans were also completed. A second broad surgical blitz is being developed and will be launched soon.

In total across Alberta, more than 36,000 ophthalmological surgeries will be performed in 2010/11.

The one-year-RFP agreements signed with four Ophthalmology Surgical Centres in March 2010 and publicly funded by the Government of Alberta remain in place and are not affected by today's *Expression of Interest* posting. Ophthalmology procedures outside of Edmonton and Calgary (including Medicine Hat, Lethbridge, Wetaskiwin, Red Deer, Stony Plain, Westlock, Lamont, Fort Saskatchewan, and Grande Prairie) will not be affected either.

Alberta Health Services is the provincial health authority responsible for planning and delivering health supports and services for more than 3.7 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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For media inquiries, contact:

Bruce Conway
403.943.1212
Alberta Health Services

Minister Gene Zwozdesky
780.446.1144
Alberta Health and Wellness