



## NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Health

### **HIV+ NEW MOMS GET ACCESS TO INFANT FORMULA**

VANCOUVER – The Provincial Health Services Authority and the Oak Tree Clinic of BC Women's Hospital & Health Centre have successfully worked with community-based HIV/AIDS organizations to ensure that mothers who are HIV-positive will be able to access infant formula at no cost.

“Providing infant formula to mothers infected with HIV is an important and effective practice that prevents post-natal transmission of HIV to uninfected babies,” said Health Minister George Abbott. “In British Columbia, we have achieved great success in preventing mother-to-child transmission of HIV and our goal is to continue this success and eliminate this form of infection within the province.”

The Provincial Health Services Authority (PHSA), one of six health authorities in British Columbia, acted on a recommendation made by community-based groups and partnering agencies the BC Persons With AIDS Society, the Positive Women's Network and A Loving Spoonful to fund this \$72,000 program for the current fiscal year. Approximately 30 infants are born to HIV-positive mothers in B.C. every year.

The funding means that all HIV-positive mothers are now able to access this type of support. While mothers on social assistance received formula through the Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance, more than half of the HIV-positive new mothers in B.C. last year were not recipients of MEIA, and therefore had to cover the cost of formula on their own.

“PHSA recognized this gap last year and provided an interim grant to A Loving Spoonful, but we agreed with the partners' call for a consistent, reliable and easily-administered program,” said PHSA president and CEO Lynda Cranston. “The investment is small but the potential payback, in terms of preventing the high lifetime health-care costs to support an infant who acquires HIV, is enormous.”

In a statement released by the three partnering agencies, the group expressed enthusiasm about the recent funding announcement, “We are pleased that the PHSA has recognized the long-range benefits of preventing mother-to-child HIV transmission by providing free infant formula to all HIV positive new mothers in B.C. The program will especially benefit HIV positive women who face multiple challenges through circumstances of poverty, addictions, racism, and violence. It is our hope that once the program benefits are apparent, the PHSA will extend the funding beyond the current fiscal year.”

As part of its mandate to provide provincewide agencies and services, the PHSA received funding from the Ministry of Health to provide approximately \$6 million annually for organizations working to support those living with HIV/AIDS across the province.

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As well, the PHSA continues to play an active role in the overall HIV/AIDS strategy for the province directly and through the work of its agencies such as the BC Centre for Disease Control and BC Women's Hospital & Health Centre's Oak Tree Clinic. The clinic provides specialized HIV care for infected women, pregnant women, and children.

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