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**Attention Health Reporters and Assignment Editors**

## **Health Council of Canada report calls for early, ongoing action to tackle trouble spots in kids' health**

**WINNIPEG, MB, JUNE 22, 2006** – While the health of Canada's children and youth is generally good, especially by global standards, there are serious trouble spots within this population that require strategic, immediate and sustained attention, the Health Council of Canada said in a report released today.

The report, *Their Future Is Now: Healthy Choices for Canada's Children & Youth*, says many of those problems are in fact preventable – if we act now. The report looks broadly across child health issues, from immunization and obesity risks to mental health and crime prevention, reviews government commitments to improve child health, highlights effective regional programs and the ingredients key to their success, and offers advice for future action.

The report says that the best way to secure a healthy population and a prosperous future for Canada is to invest in children today, focusing on both the medical and non-medical needs of the young, such as education and economic status.

"This report underscores in flashing lights that the social and economic context for children is powerfully important to their long-term health," said Dr. Nuala Kenny, a pediatrician and the chair of the Health Council's working group which created the report. "But we also know that looming increases in chronic disease and alarming obesity rates put all children at risk."

Among the areas of concern highlighted in the report: one-quarter of Canadian children are overweight or obese, risking serious chronic conditions later in life; more than 40 per cent of children in Aboriginal and new immigrant families live in poverty, compared to a national average of 17 to 18 per cent; an estimated 1.1 million (14 per cent) of Canadian children have mental health conditions; unintentional injuries remain the leading cause of death and a major cause of hospitalization among children and youth; and a majority of children with severe disabilities report unmet needs for aids and devices.

Another reality is that the proportion of children and youth in the Canadian population is shrinking. In 2001, one out of every four Canadians was under 19 years of age. If current trends continue, by 2021 only one out of every five Canadians will be under age 19, while one out of every four will be over 60.

Health Council Acting Chair Jeanne Besner said if we don't invest in children because of pressing demands to provide services for aging baby boomers, we will be jeopardizing all our futures. "Evidence shows us that the earlier we act to support children the better. It is less expensive and more effective to focus on the health of children, rather than to deal later with their chronic health conditions," Besner said.

Besner said the report shows that many jurisdictions understand this reality, and are responding with exceptional strategies to improve the health and well-being of children and youth. (see background) For example, the Council released its report in Winnipeg to highlight Healthy Child Manitoba, a government-wide initiative that brings eight cabinet ministers and ministries together with 26 Parent-Child Centered Coalitions to support families. Healthy Child Manitoba is also the focus of a short documentary video the Council released today in conjunction with the report.

"The approach taken by Healthy Child Manitoba is one of a number of encouraging regional initiatives singled-out in our report. Programs that take a similarly broad approach and demonstrate a

commitment to supporting children and families must be encouraged and replicated across the country," Besner said.

Added Kenny: "Sometimes the East Coast doesn't know what the West Coast has done; sometimes, people in central Canada are piloting a project that has already been well demonstrated in Newfoundland. We need to share and build on the knowledge and know-how already in play."

The report suggests governments fund strategic activities which support healthy child and youth development, renew their commitment to early childhood development, accelerate the implementation of primary health care teams and information management, reform income security to address poverty, develop a pan-Canadian child and youth health strategy, and engage Canadians on the importance of child and youth health.

**The full report and documentary can be downloaded at [www.healthcouncilcanada.ca](http://www.healthcouncilcanada.ca).**

The Health Council of Canada, created by the 2003 First Ministers' Accord on Health Care Renewal following the recommendations of the Romanow and Kirby reports, is mandated to monitor and report on the progress of health care renewal in Canada. The 26 Councillors were appointed by the participating provinces, territories and the Government of Canada and have expertise and broad experience in community care, Aboriginal health, nursing, health education and administration, finance, medicine and pharmacy.

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