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## **ONTARIO BECOMES NATIONAL LEADER IN NEWBORN SCREENING** *New State-Of-The-Art Testing Program means children will have best start in life*

OTTAWA – The McGuinty government is protecting Ontario’s children by establishing a state-of-the-art screening program at The Children’s Hospital of Eastern Ontario (CHEO), Health and Long-Term Care Minister George Smitherman announced today.

“We are making tremendous progress to ensure children in Ontario are healthy and have the best possible start in life,” Smitherman said. “CHEO will be a centre of excellence in newborn screening, with the most comprehensive program in the country. Working with the best technology available, it will identify infants with a wide range of disorders, so that they can get the treatment they need as soon as possible.”

The government will be investing \$18 million – about \$5 million to cover the one-time purchase technology, and about \$13 million in ongoing annual funding. Smitherman also announced the addition of six new tests to the newborn screening program, building on the nineteen additional tests announced in September. Once this expansion is complete, Ontario will test for 27 rare genetic diseases including 20 inherited metabolic disorders (IMDs), four endocrine disorders, and three blood disorders. Ontario will be the only jurisdiction in Canada to test for blood disorders like sickle cell disease.

“I am delighted that Ontario has taken the Canadian lead in implementing universal newborn screening for blood disorders like sickle cell disease,” said Dr. Isaac Odame, Chair of the Hemoglobinopathy Group of Ontario at McMaster University Medical Centre.

IMDs, blood and endocrine disorders are rare but they can cause serious health difficulties – such as developmental delays, brain damage and mental retardation – and in some cases even death. The expansion is based on advice from the Newborn Screening Subcommittee of the Ontario Advisory Committee on Genetics, whose final report is expected in December.

“We commend the government for providing the tools to identify and treat newborns with these rare genetic disorders,” said Dr. Ted Boadway, Executive Director of Health Policy with the Ontario Medical Association. “The expansion of the program will make Ontario a leader in newborn screening.”

CHEO’s newborn screening program will be in operation by March 2006 with all the new tests for IMDs, blood and endocrine disorders being performed by the end of 2006.

“We’re thrilled to have been chosen as the host hospital for what will be the leading newborn screening program in Canada,” said Gary Cardiff, CEO of CHEO. “We look forward to using our expertise and the latest technology available for the early detection of a wide range of potential health problems in newborns.”

Smitherman also announced new training opportunities with the endowment of two fellowships in newborn screening and the development of educational materials for the public and healthcare providers.

In addition, a permanent advisory committee will be established to provide oversight and ongoing advice to the government on its newborn screening program. Dr. Joe Clarke, head of clinical metabolic genetics at The Hospital for Sick Children, will be the chair. The committee will look at improving the ordering and distribution of speciality foods for IMD patients, as well as whether a test for cystic fibrosis should be part of the newborn screening program.

“I am very pleased to accept this invitation to be the founding chair of a permanent newborn screening advisory committee,” said Dr. Joe Clarke, head of clinical metabolic genetics at The Hospital for Sick Children. “I’m also very happy that the government has moved so quickly to expand this program.”

The expansion of newborn screening is part of the McGuinty government’s commitment to build a health care system that delivers on three priorities – keeping Ontarians healthy, reducing wait times and improving access to doctors and nurses.

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