

SPEAKING NOTES

**Action, not words:  
Supporting a different course for Aboriginal health care**

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Chair, Saint Elizabeth Health Care

*-Check against delivery-*

Good morning everyone and thank you for coming. My name is Michael Decter, and it is my privilege to be the Board Chair of Saint Elizabeth Health Care. Let me begin by introducing our guests and colleagues here. To my left, we have Shirlee Sharkey, President and CEO. Beside her, from Manitoba, we have Jerry Smith, who is the Home and Community Care Coordinator for the Peguis First Nation.

We also have with us in the audience:

- Lesley Larsen, who has been a key leader in our work with First Nations over the past five years.
- Edna Stevens, a Nurse Manager with the First Nations and Inuit Health Branch in Winnipeg; and,
- A cross-section of staff from Saint Elizabeth Health Care, including members of our leadership team: Neil Barran, Nancy Hawkes, Peter Massel, Nancy Lefebvre and Roy French.

As someone who spends much of my life in the policy swirl of health care, let's just say that if studies and reports could fix a health care system, we would already have a perfect one in Canada. You know reports are important, and analysis is important; but action is more important. That's

what I love about what we are doing today – it's about action, not words. That said, we will keep our words brief, and will be happy to answer your questions following this short presentation.

To be involved with Saint Elizabeth Health Care is a source of enormous pride. We provide health care to people in their homes, allowing them to maintain their independence, dignity and quality of life. As a leader in our field since 1908, Saint Elizabeth has pioneered many new programs and services – from home chemotherapy, to community-based mental health care, to the very exciting program we are launching today. With our unique focus on personal empowerment, we have grown steadily to become one of the largest not-for-profit home care providers in Ontario, employing 3,700 people and delivering three million visits annually.

Within this rich tradition of caring, there is a never-ending quest to do things in an innovative way, and in a future-oriented way. At the heart of our passion, is a profound respect for human dignity; a calling to serve others in times of trouble and need.

There is no group in Canada that meets that test better than our Aboriginal peoples. When you travel throughout our country, you find First Nations and Inuit living on the most difficult land; in remote, often isolated, communities; and with the worst health status.

Dignity, in my view, is not only about how people are treated by a health care system or by a society; it's also about people being able to do things for themselves.

The focus needs to be on training local people to identify and respond to local needs in a flexible and cost-effective way. Often, the front-line provider is a community health representative, or perhaps a nurse. Either way, they need support. They need to be part of a larger network to deliver quality care. And that doesn't happen by accident. It certainly doesn't happen easily in communities where needs are high and resources are slim.

At Saint Elizabeth Health Care, we have something to contribute; it's very basic, and it works very well.

@YourSide Colleague is a web-based program that brings the modern advantages of expert knowledge and connectivity to some of the most remote and difficult parts of our country. All that is needed is a computer, access to the Internet, and a username and password.

As you will hear in the video, the practical benefits of this approach have garnered many champions. They include nearly 50 First Nations communities across Manitoba, who have been using the program for over two years to improve local health care and delivery.

In the wake of Kashechewan, our success in Manitoba inspired Shirlee and her leadership team to say to our Board, *“Let’s just do it. Let’s get this out nationally. Let’s take the risk, invest the resources and do the right thing.”* And as a Board, we were unanimously delighted and supportive of the idea.

To support a different course for Aboriginal health care – today and for the future – Saint Elizabeth Health Care is pleased to announce that we will invest \$2 million over the next three years to support the national rollout of @YourSide Colleague to First Nations and Inuit communities across

Canada. In addition to the dollars, we will commit our talented leadership team to this challenge.

We will begin working immediately with First Nations and Inuit partners to put this very powerful tool in place, on the ground, community by community. They are keen for this – that's what is so great about it. We are not doing this for them or to them; we are doing this with them.

We are moving ahead in a real spirit of partnership. We welcome governments and other partners to bring resources to this challenge. The reality is we simply can't afford to wait. The gap in health and quality of life between Aboriginals and other Canadians needs action, not words.

We have a short video to show you, and then would be happy to take any questions.

*{Play video – long version}*

Watching Logan in the video, I am reminded of the truth that *what we want for ourselves, we want for all* – I want Logan to have the same opportunities for a healthy life as my own daughter.

Thank you.

We would be happy to take questions now.