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June 4, 2009

**\$30-MILLION STRATEGY OPENING DOORS FOR MANITOBANS WITH DISABILITIES
New Investments Kick-start Consultations To Build Foundation for Comprehensive Strategy**

The province is renewing its commitment to a long-term strategy for Manitobans who have disabilities with a \$30-million down payment on more accessible housing, enhanced access to public buildings, more support for children with disabilities in child care, better employment services and improved supports for caregivers, Family Services and Housing Minister Gord Mackintosh, minister responsible for persons with disabilities, announced today.

This investment in creating a more accessible, inclusive society marks the launch of consultations that will build the foundation for a long-term vision for Manitobans with disabilities, Mackintosh said.

"Everyone has abilities. People are not 'disabled' except by our attitudes and the environment built around them," Mackintosh said. "Our challenge is to unleash the untapped energy by breaking down barriers."

As a basis for consultations, Mackintosh released a document that focuses on 10 priorities for action as the province seeks to build on its 2001 strategy: Full Citizenship: A Manitoba Strategy on Disability.

The minister said the \$30-million down payment, which includes contributions from the federal government, includes:

- \$5.4-million for HOMEWorks! for Manitobans with disabilities. This two-year federal-provincial initiative includes targeted construction of additional housing units and will focus on greater community living for people with intellectual disabilities, physical accessibility and housing that people with mobility restrictions can easily access (visitable housing).
- a \$11-million barrier-busting infrastructure plan. Eight initiatives will be funded to make public buildings more accessible in Winnipeg, Emerson, Brandon, Portage la Prairie, Minnedosa and Morden. In addition, 15 schools will construct grooming rooms, specialized washrooms, chair lifts or elevators. Investments will also be made to enhance provincial campground accessibility and upgrades to 14 non-profit community facilities.
- \$12.8 million in additional funding for disability services. This funding will largely help more people with intellectual disabilities live and participate in the community. There will be \$2.7 million in additional funding for children with disabilities including therapy services for about 750 more children, 8.5 new preschool Applied Behavioural Analysis spots and respite services for 80 new families.
- New marketAbilities employment initiatives. Five hundred Manitobans with disabilities will be enabled to get jobs through Reaching E-Quality Employment Services with \$522,000 in new funding. A new comprehensive guide will serve as a valuable resource for Manitobans with disabilities who are seeking jobs or training, or want to start their own businesses.
- A child-care inclusion support program. The plan includes \$400,000 in funding for enhanced access to specialized equipment and a regulatory requirement for annual personalized child plans and inclusive programming, as well as training and mentoring for child-care workers.

- A boost to Manitoba's New Primary Caregiver Tax Credit. Now, rather than needing an in-depth home-care assessment, the caregiver of anyone in community living or children's special services will automatically qualify, which will significantly cut the time and effort required to receive a tax credit of up to \$1,020 each year.

Jennifer Howard, MLA for Fort Rouge, will chair an interdepartmental working group of senior officials to steer the implementation of Opening Doors. There will be annual public reporting through the minister.

Comments on Opening Doors are sought from the public and may be sent to the Disabilities Issues Office by e-mail at openingdoors@gov.mb.ca or mailed to the office at Room 630 - 240 Graham Ave., Winnipeg, MB R3C 0J7. The consultation paper is posted at www.gov.mb.ca/dio. Meetings with stakeholders will also be conducted by Howard.

The minister made the announcement at the official opening of Place Bertrand, a 20-household, \$3 million HOMEWorks! affordable housing initiative for people with disabilities in St. Boniface.

"Place Bertrand is a good example of how we can build communities that are inclusive of all people. With our mobility accessibility, universal-design concept and rent supplements for half the units, this is a celebration of how we can accommodate diversity," said Don Onofriechuk, chairperson of Ten Ten Sinclair Housing, which operates Place Bertrand.

The announcement is part of ALL Aboard, Manitoba's poverty-reduction and social inclusion strategy.