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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 31, 2006

Health services now available En Français

Vancouver, BC – Francophone residents in Greater Vancouver can now more easily access French-speaking health care providers, French-language health information, and a 24/7 interpreter service for health appointments thanks to En Français -- a unique project partnership by the Provincial Health Services Authority (PHSA), Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH) and RésoSanté Colombie-Britannique.

The En Français project offers Francophone residents in the region improved access to French-speaking interpreters, doctors, and other health care providers, and linkages to French-language health education materials and health care services.

Almost 30,000 Francophone people live in Vancouver, and BC's Francophone community is the fifth-largest Francophone community in Canada. However, the language barrier may compromise their ability to have their health care needs met.

Annie Carnot is a PHSA Francophone initiatives representative who helps Francophone people get connected with health services. She recalls a Francophone woman newly arrived from the Congo who struggled when her daughter had a bike accident.

"When she arrived at Emergency, she was not able to tell ER staff what had happened and found it difficult to fill out the registration forms. She was really stressed and felt ashamed about not being able to explain the situation," said Carnot. "It was only after she encountered a helpful nurse who could speak a little French that she was able to communicate the situation and complete the documents. Knowing that a service such as En Français is available may make her experience easier in the future."

According to a Sept. 2001 Report to the Federal Minister of Health, a lack of access to health services in one's own language can have a number of detrimental health care impacts. Lack of access can:

- Reduce the use of preventative services;
- Increase the time spent in consultation, diagnosis and treatment;
- Decrease the probability of patient compliance with treatment.

The Provincial Language Service (PLS), a PHSA program, provides health-focused interpreting, translation and cross-cultural program development services throughout BC. Interpreting services are provided in over 100 languages. The PHSA/PLS En Français initiative, made possible through federal and provincial funding, has specifically supported access to health services for BC's Francophone population. As a result, PLS now offers the following resources and services for Francophone British Columbians:

- A one-stop, province-wide access point for health care interpreting and translation services in French. In the Lower Mainland, call 604.875.3402, or, toll-free,

1.877.BCTALKS or 1.877.228.2557. People with general questions about this, or the following PHSA En Français initiatives, can email: ACarnot@phsa.ca

- French-language health resources – a provincial directory of French-speaking health care providers, and an increasing number of French-language health information materials available through the PHSA website at: www.phsa.ca/francais
- A formal connection/collaboration between the assessment team for children with special needs at Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique (CSF) and the services of Sunny Hill Health Centre for Children, BC Children's Hospital, and the BC Autism Assessment Network.

“The goal of En Français is to help maximize positive health outcomes for Francophone British Columbians by making it easier for them to access health services in both of Canada’s official languages,” said Suzanne Barclay, director, the Provincial Language Service, PHSA.

“We are informing health care providers and their patients across BC that help is available if they face a language barrier. Health care providers need simply to contact our one-stop, province-wide access point for health care interpreting and translation services,” added Barclay. “Or, if the patient or client simply wants to see a French-speaking doctor directly, our provincial directory is available online. These services are not only designed to reduce the experience of alienation and powerlessness common to people dealing with health issues in a language not familiar to them, but also to enable health care professionals and health care organizations to deliver better care to BC’s increasingly linguistically-diverse communities.”

New Francophone health resources and services offered by VCH are:

- Francophone Health Resources website that is part of the VCH website (providing information in the French-language on VCH services/facilities, as well as health education materials on various topics). www.vchfrancophonehealth.ca People with general questions about this, or the following VCH En Français initiative, can email: vchfrancophone@vch.ca
- New enhancements to the client information system and staff training will enable Community Health Centres to be able to record language needs.

“VCH is delighted to be working with PHSA and RésoSanté Colombie-Britannique on this project,” said Ted Bruce, executive director, Primary Health Care Network, VCH. “The health care provider directory and health education materials available on our website will improve the health care experiences of Francophone families within the region.”

“The woman from the Congo’s situation has since improved,” added Carnot. “Thanks to the provincial directory of French-speaking health care providers, she has also located a French-speaking dentist, and is really happy to see the availability of interesting resources and documents for Francophone people. And she said next time she will definitely use the interpreting services.”

En Français was made possible through a financial contribution from Health Canada through the Société Santé en français, a national health network working to improve French-language health services. Additional funding was provided by the BC Francophone Affairs Program for the purposes of increasing access to French-language translations of Ministry of Health and Ministry of Children and Family Development documents, and to fund a Francophone initiatives liaison position with the PLS.

PHSA plans, manages and evaluates selected specialty and province-wide health care services across BC, working with the five geographic health authorities to deliver province-wide solutions that improve the health of British Columbians.

VCH is responsible for the delivery of about \$1.9 billion in public, acute, and residential health care services to more than one million people in communities from Richmond through Vancouver,

the North Shore, the Sea-to-Sky Corridor including Whistler and Squamish, the Sunshine Coast, Powell River and the Central Coast.

Based on beliefs of respect, diversity, equity, and accessibility, in a spirit of partnership and dialogue, RésoSanté Colombie-Britannique supports the development, integration, and sustainability of French-language health services throughout BC.

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