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## NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Health Services

### **8-1-1 SERVICE MAKES ACCESSING HEALTH ADVICE EASIER**

BURNABY – Starting today, British Columbians can simply dial 8-1-1 to get 24/7 health information, medical advice and help navigating B.C.'s health-care system, announced Health Services Minister George Abbott.

“8-1-1 is the gateway to an expanded tele-health service called HealthLink BC,” said Abbott. “We’re meeting our throne speech commitment to ensure greater choice and access for patients, and building on several of our very successful services, such as BC NurseLine and Dial-A-Dietitian, to create the most comprehensive non-emergency health information service in Canada.”

The HealthLink BC service includes a new health system navigation service that is accessible via telephone or the Internet. The navigation system assists the public and health professionals in finding and accessing appropriate health resources in, or close, to their home communities.

“As part of the enhanced phone and web services, each health authority has designated individuals responsible for ensuring that HealthLink BC has the most up-to-date information on health resources for each region of the province,” added Abbott. “For example, our enhanced services will make it much simpler for a pregnant mother to determine the closest prenatal program to her home, or for a senior living in a rural community to locate an influenza immunization clinic.”

A trained health service representative will answer all 8-1-1 telephone calls, and where appropriate, calls will be transferred to a registered nurse, pharmacist or dietitian for further information and advice. The 8-1-1 service can provide assistance with answers to questions about a variety of health topics, help in identifying symptoms and advice on when to seek medical treatment.

8-1-1 has translation services available in over 130 languages and is one of several non-emergency services operated under the umbrella of HealthLink BC. Other HealthLink BC services include BC HealthGuide handbooks, BC HealthFiles, Dial-A-Dietitian, bcbedline and an interactive website, [www.healthlinkbc.ca](http://www.healthlinkbc.ca).

The HealthLink BC website provides information on over 4,000 health topics, symptoms, and over-the-counter and prescription drugs and offers tips for maintaining a healthy lifestyle. The site also offers an integrated search and mapping function to over 2,500 health services to help British Columbians find health services close to their home communities.

“While the HealthLink BC website provides a wealth of information on various health topics, including illnesses, it also empowers people with information on healthy living,” said Healthy Living and Sport Minister Mary Polak. “Eventually, we’ll work through this website to link people directly to community resources like recreation centres, bike paths and walkways so it’s even easier to make healthy choices.”

HealthLink BC services are endorsed by the British Columbia Medical Association, the BC College of Family Physicians, the College of Registered Nurses of British Columbia and the College of Pharmacists of British Columbia.

British Columbians who are hearing or speech impaired are able to access HealthLink BC telephone services from a TTY service or device by dialing 7-1-1.

“The 8-1-1 telephone service and HealthLink BC website are excellent resources for patients and health-care providers across B.C.,” said Dr. Shamin Jetha, president of the BC College of Family Physicians. “Not only will these services provide health information and advice to British Columbians and support them in finding appropriate health resources close to home, but these services will also assist health professionals in ensuring that their patients receive the very best care.”

As part of its 8-1-1 service, HealthLink BC will soon be able to better support chronic disease patients, homecare and palliative services and will work with the BC Medical Association to establish a limited specialist referral service. Pilots of these expanded services will get underway within the next two years.

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1 backgrounder(s) attached.

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