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**MANITOBA EYE-SCREENING PROGRAM
HELPING PREVENT VISION PROBLEMS FOR PEOPLE WITH DIABETES: IRVIN-ROSS**

A \$3-million screening program is helping people with diabetes in northern Manitoba to connect with retinal screening services, Healthy Living Minister Kerri Irvin-Ross said today.

The Manitoba Retinal Screening Vision Program (RSVP) provides services to monitor changes to the retina that can cause severe vision loss and blindness for people with diabetes.

“Screening is an effective tool to help prevent diabetic retinopathy, which is the most common cause of new cases of legal blindness in North America,” said Irvin-Ross. “Monitoring the vision of people with diabetes helps catch problems before they become severe, helping us provide better care sooner and closer to home for people in northern Manitoba living with this serious chronic disease.”

Nurses in northern and remote communities in Manitoba use a specialized digital camera to take photographs of individuals’ eyes. The photographs are reviewed at a central interpretation centre at the Misericordia Health Centre in Winnipeg and those who need treatment are referred to a specialist in Winnipeg.

“The Winnipeg Regional Health Authority’s ophthalmology program and the Misericordia Eye Care Centre of Excellence are pleased to provide the retinal ophthalmology expertise to this exciting outreach program,” said Rosie Jacuzzi, president and chief operating officer of the Misericordia Health Centre and Winnipeg Regional Health Authority regional ophthalmology lead. “Both the patient and health-care system are winners in this new model of eye-care delivery.”

The program serves Manitobans living in the Burntwood and NOR-MAN regional health authorities. To date in 2007, more than 400 Manitobans have had their vision screened with 97 referred for further care.

“The Burntwood region has the highest rate of diabetes in the province and the Manitoba Retinal Vision Screening Program is welcomed by the Burntwood Regional Health Authority,” said Marie O’Neill, chief executive officer of the authority. “Giving northern patients an opportunity to have screening performed in the north will increase the early detection of the diabetic retinopathy without requiring patients to travel the long distances to Winnipeg.”

Irvin-Ross noted the program builds on Manitoba's Regional Diabetes Program as well as the government's commitment to healthy living and the prevention of chronic diseases.

"More than 67,000 Manitobans have been diagnosed with diabetes and this number continues to rise," said Irvin-Ross. "Our goal is to help Manitobans stay healthy through a balance of prevention and care, and programs like this will continue our efforts."

For more information on the Manitoba Retinal Screening Program, northern Manitoba residents can contact their local regional health authority office.