



## NEWS RELEASE

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### Partners open Saskatchewan's first in-school optometry clinic

**SASKATOON, June 15, 2010** – It's now easier for children at St. Mary Community School to visit an optometrist – they just have to head upstairs to an in-school clinic that is the first of its kind in Saskatchewan.

The clinic began operation this spring thanks to a partnership between the Saskatchewan Association of Optometrists (SAO), Saskatoon Tribal Council (STC) and Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools.

While the clinic has been available since April to St. Mary students, long-term plans are to ensure that children in all nearby schools can access the services of an optometrist. The clinic is currently staffed one day a week by local optometrists. Cost for the basic equipment needed at the clinic is shared by the partners. Funds are still required and donations are welcome.

"The earlier a vision problem is diagnosed and treated, the less negative impact it will have on a child's development," explained Dr. Dorothy Barrie, a Saskatoon optometrist. "Undetected and untreated vision problems can interfere with a child's ability to learn in school and other childhood activities. Visual impairment in children can be associated with developmental delays and the need for special education, vocational and social service often beyond childhood and into adulthood," she said.

"Ideally all children should receive a comprehensive eye examination by age 3 or at least when they begin school."

Eye examinations are covered under the provincial health plan. Many conditions are easier to correct when children are younger.

"Our school division strives to help children reach their full potential in the classroom and as people. This clinic will help make sure they are not held back by undetected eye problems," said Diane Boyko, Chair of the Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools Board of Education.

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“The Saskatoon Tribal Council is pleased to be able to contribute to the expansion of primary health services available in the form of the new optometry clinic for the children of St. Mary Community School and the people living in the community,” said STC Tribal Chief Felix Thomas. “It further advances our goal that a high quality of life is available to all our members and First Nations people living in Saskatoon.”

Thomas said he is also pleased that the project strengthens STC's partnership with St. Mary and introduces a new partner to the circle – the Saskatchewan Association of Optometrists.

“The winners are the children who will receive complete eye health and vision assessment. This is a primary concern as poor vision can have such an effect on childhood and on a child's learning experience,” Thomas said.

St. Mary Community School is also home to a pediatrics clinic. Medical, optometric and other wellness services are included in plans for the new St. Mary Community School, which are awaiting final approval from the Ministry of Education before construction tenders are called.

Delivering community-based health services to children in low-income neighbourhoods is one part of the response to the Saskatoon Health Region health disparities study released in November 2006. It found that people living in the city's core areas have significantly lower health status compared to other Saskatoon residents. By changing how and where services are available, people will be able to achieve the same quality of life that others enjoy.

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