

May 23, 2007 – Experts from across Alberta and Canada have gathered in Calgary today for a three-day conference to discuss and develop a consensus paper in an effort to address Alberta’s steadily rising rate of low birth weight babies. The conference – Healthy Mothers – Healthy Babies: How to Prevent Low Birth Weight is being held at the Sheraton Suites Calgary Eau Claire until Friday.

“Alberta’s rate of low birth weight babies is 6.4 per cent compared to the national average of 5.8 per cent. That’s despite our generally high standard of living, good access to clinical and community resources and sophisticated programming,” says Dr. Ian Lange, Regional Department Head, Obstetrics & Gynaecology, Calgary Health Region. “For some unexplained reason the rate has been resistant to reduction and instead continues to escalate steadily. This conference gives us an opportunity to look at the factors that contribute to low birth weight, what can be done to reduce the rate and whether we can develop realistic strategies to address this issue.”

During the conference experts will look at:

- what low birth weight is and how frequently it occurs
- the implications of low birth weight
- the factors that contribute to it
- what can be done to reduce the incidence
- the most effective service delivery models to reduce it
- what further research is needed

Following the first two days of the conference, a panel of experts will develop the consensus paper which will be released publicly Friday morning. This paper will help provide future direction in planning strategies to address the issue of low birth weight babies.

“The short and long-term impacts of low birth weight on families, the health care system and communities is profound, and is something we should all be concerned about,” says Dr. Radha Chari, Divisional Director for Maternal Fetal Medicine with Capital Health’s Royal Alexandra Hospital. “The consensus paper that will result from the conference will help us chart a new path to address low birth weight in Alberta.”

Conference partners are the Alberta Perinatal Health Program, Institute of Health Economics, Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research, ICARE, Calgary Health Region, and Capital Health. The Alberta Perinatal Health Program is a tripartite partnership between the Calgary Health Region, Capital Health and the Alberta Medical Association.

Contacts:

Ronna Bremer
Capital Health
Phone: (780) 735-5111
Cell: (780) 905-9842

Lynda Phelan
Calgary Health Region
Phone: (403) 955-7085
Cell: (780) 519-4439