



Ministerial Statement

**Senator Lynne A. Woolridge, J.P.
THE JUNIOR MINISTER OF HEALTH AND SENIORS,**

ON: The Beyond Wellness Medical Clinic

December 4th, 2013

Madam President,

Two weeks ago I had the opportunity to share with the members of this Honorable Chamber news of the launch of STEPS to a Well Bermuda, the island's chronic disease risk factor survey. STEPS will provide us with factual information on important chronic disease risk factors in Bermuda and on the prevalence of specific chronic diseases, such as diabetes and obesity.

Madam President, today I am pleased to provide the members of this Senate, and the public, with an update on another initiative within the Ministry of Health and Seniors, the Beyond Wellness Clinic at the Department of Health.

Improving the management of chronic diseases to prevent costly and disabling consequences, is essential. The Department of Health recognizes chronic disease management as an urgent public health priority at this time, especially in our citizens who are uninsured or under-insured.

However, the Department also recognizes that multiple factors determine the outcome of chronic diseases and we understand that a multi-disciplinary approach must be applied to the problem. No entity within the health care system can single-handedly achieve the necessary improvements in this problem.

Therefore, Madam President, the Department of Health has begun to pilot a system of community collaboration to improve the quality of care for uninsured members of our community at risk for complications from their chronic disease.

You may recall that in September I announced the plans for the endeavor and today I am pleased to announce that the Beyond Wellness Clinic began its pilot program as of November 6th. On that date, the Department of Health quietly welcomed referred clients to this pilot programme to improve the management of their chronic disease.

The pilot program will focus on 5 chronic diseases: diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, asthma and obesity. These particular diseases, which we have conveniently referred to as the “Big 5”, were selected due to their high prevalence on the island, their significant impact on the health of our population and cost to the health system due to complications requiring acute care.

The pilot programme expects to work closely with the private health care community to support the needs of referred clients, all of whom will have early-to- mid stage disease processes whose outcome would be improved by primary care interventions.

Madam President, the needs of the community’s uninsured and under-insured citizens are admittedly great. Not all these individuals have chronic diseases that are at an early stage. Many uninsured individuals have been without adequate health care services for months or years. Some have advanced diseases and are already battling complications requiring hospitalization and intensive management. The needs of these citizens weigh heavily on the conscience of all health care professionals as well as on the hearts of all Bermudians.

Comprehensive medical care, which provides multiple specialists and advanced medical support, is a recognized need for these individuals. These complex health needs must ultimately be addressed by a continuum of community-based chronic disease care. Such a system of support for chronic disease must be established as soon as possible, and it will require input from all sectors of the health system.

Madam President, the Ministry of Health and Seniors has a simple strategy for addressing this most pressing health problem in Bermuda. We have planned a phased approach to improving chronic diseases management. The phases will be rolled out gradually over the next two years, but Phase one began on November 6th as the Beyond Wellness Clinic.

The pilot phase of the Beyond Wellness Clinic will continue through March 31st, 2014. This phase will necessarily limit the service to a manageable number of clients to assure quality and to accurately document the impact of the service. The pilot will accommodate approximately 75 uninsured adults with chronic disease.

To achieve the goals of quality service with documentable outcomes, the Beyond Wellness Clinic will accept only uninsured or under-insured clients who have been referred by a health care professional for management of their early to mid-stage chronic disease, one of the Big 5 noted previously.

Close communication and collaboration will be maintained with the referring health care provider, and patients will agree to a “health contract” with the clinic confirming their willingness to take personal responsibility for their health. Clients will be encouraged and supported to comply with treatment plans and to follow up as requested for care.

Madam President, this collaborative approach, involving the patient and their private health care provider, optimizes the management of chronic diseases and improves health outcomes. The meaningful health outcome measures we aim to achieve are a reduction in acute care visits (Emergency Department visits and hospital admissions) and improved clinical test results.

As was shared in September with the members of this Chamber, this new initiative does not purport to provide the entire solution to the problem of chronic diseases management in Bermuda, nor can it fully address the multi-faceted health needs of the financially under-privileged citizens.

The Beyond Wellness Clinic is simply one step toward creating a continuum of care in the community for under-insured adults with chronic disease.

We expect that it will help to bridge the gap of care for individuals who do not have adequate insurance coverage to meet their chronic disease management needs. It seeks to provide support, in the form of primary care interventions, to improve the management of selected chronic diseases.

Madam President, the Ministry of Health and Seniors looks forward to developing additional supports to the system of community-based chronic disease management over the coming months. The necessary shift in paradigm will be encouraged in the months ahead as we plan within the Ministry and with our health partners to make prevention and primary care interventions a top priority.

Madam President, The Ministry of Health and Seniors supports the concept of a phased approach to chronic disease management because we understand that these complex, often long-standing conditions, will not be managed without new approaches and creative solutions involving all stakeholders.

Patients themselves are central to the changes we need to see: our lifestyles will have to change; cooperation between the public and private health sectors will need to be taken to new heights; and health system financing will need to reflect the change in priorities from acute care to community-based continuum of care for chronic diseases. Prevention and early intervention will truly become our way of life.

Planning and redesigning services, redistributing and re-allocating resources will take place in the year ahead. A phased plan of action will allow the essential components to be assembled in our health care system to support the continuum of care required for chronic disease management.

This continuum will ultimately link community-based resources to our current Chronic Disease Management Centre and, when required, to specialist care and acute care services.

The Beyond Wellness pilot is our start on this journey to creating a continuum of community care for vulnerable citizens with chronic diseases.

Madam President, the urgency of Bermuda’s chronic disease situation is acknowledged, and for this reason it is a priority to support initiatives which aim to prevent chronic medical conditions, and to provide access to early intervention when these conditions arise. The collaborative approach of the Beyond Wellness Clinic will aim to enlist multiple sectors of the community health system to improve the support to our under-insured adults.

Madam President, I am confident that my fellow Senators all agree that the health of our citizens is a fundamental prerequisite to the wellbeing and prosperity of our island. This realization will lead us to finding ways to collaborate in a non-partisan fashion during the economically challenging months ahead. In a spirit of cooperation we can identify solutions to the chronic disease crisis facing us.

Madam President, it is only through unifying and coordinating our efforts to improve the health of all our citizens that we can achieve true prosperity. Indeed as the World Health Organization Director-General, Dr. Margaret Chan notes, “There is a dynamic relationship between health and wealth.” Indeed, our health is our wealth.

Thank you, **Madam President**.