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Australian Capital Territory

Minister for Health and Community Care

Independent

Member for Molonglo

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Launch of the ACT Genetics Service

The ACT is set to enhance its reputation as a clever, caring capital with the development of its own ACT Genetics Service.

The Government will provide \$1.689 million over four years for genetic counselling and testing services to the people of the ACT and surrounding region, the Minister for Health and Community Care, Michael Moore, announced today.

The major goal of genetics services is to reduce the impact of genetic disorders and birth defects on affected individuals, at risk individuals and their family. For this to occur, public education, client counselling and appropriate clinical services are essential.

The services to be covered will include information, counselling and advice to individuals and families to help people to identify and manage genetic conditions and to make informed decisions about their own health, lifestyle and reproductive options.

"The many advances in medical knowledge and technology in recent years has increased the demand for genetic services and counselling," Mr Moore said.

"This demand is likely to further increase as a result of the Human Genome Project, due to be completed very shortly. The extra funding will help the ACT Genetics Service cope with the increased demand and provide additional services."

The ACT currently has a limited Genetics Service provided by the Women and Children's Health Service Management Team at The Canberra Hospital, and is staffed on a part-time basis by a clinical geneticist from Sydney.

Approximately 50% of current services are devoted to prenatal issues and paediatrics, and the other 50% comprise adult onset disorders including cancer, psychiatric illness and neuromuscular conditions.

The new service will involve The Canberra Hospital employing its own clinical geneticist and genetic counsellors.

Genetic counselling aims to provide accurate, up-to-date information about conditions which may be present in a family and likely to be inherited.

The information is designed to help affected individuals and their families to come to terms with and manage genetic conditions and to help people to make informed decisions about their own health, lifestyle and reproductive options.

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