

Lethbridge Herald

Friday, October 17, 2008

Thursday's announcement that the province will cover the cost of expectant mothers having their babies with the help of midwives couldn't have come at a better time for Diane Rach.

Rach is chair of the Alberta Midwife Health Disciplines Committee, which is just about to launch Alberta's first upgrading program for midwives in response to the growing shortage of physicians.

Alberta recognized the profession through legislation passed in 1994, though the first midwives weren't registered here until 1998. Midwives in the province have been lobbying for years to have their services covered under health care.

Health Minister Ron Liepert's funding announcement - to take effect April 1 with the province putting up \$4 million in the 2009-2010 fiscal year - will likely see more mothers choose that option and put an even greater demand for more midwives.

Hopefully, that will also result in more midwives stepping forward to meet that demand.

"I think this is going to be encouraging to women who held back from registering in Alberta because they didn't have an assured income," said Rach Thursday.

The pilot project, sponsoring classes in Calgary and Vancouver, is aimed at women who've already been trained overseas.

"They are a great resource that is going untapped in time of health care provider shortages," she said.

The seven-month training program targets internationally trained women who need to bridge the gaps between their own experience and the requirements of the provincial examiners. Candidates will work in communities across Western Canada under the supervision of practicing midwives. Deadline for the initial applications is this Sunday, with details available on-line from www.midwiferybridging.ca