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Correlation Between Healthy Choices and Health Care Expenditures

MR. RAMSAY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'd like to speak about the correlation between people making healthy choices today and future health care expenditures, and the prevalence of chronic illness.

Let me begin with a story that appeared on CTV yesterday evening. I would suggest that the Minister of Health and our government take this story and the findings of the research that was conducted very seriously. The story was based on a research paper that appears in the latest edition of the Canadian Journal of Public Health. It was authored by Kathleen Doering and three other researchers who say Northerners weigh more and exercise less than our southern cousins.

This new research suggests the growing gap between North and South could be setting the stage for the three northern territories to experience higher rates of chronic disease, from strokes to diabetes. The most telling sign in reading the research article was that, historically, Northerners were getting more exercise because they included more physical work in their daily lives. However, those days appear to be over. Southern Canadians are now much more physically active than residents North of 60.

From 2000 to 2005, the proportion of Northerners considered at least moderately active increased by 7 percent, while in the South the increase was almost 28 percent. We are also drinking more alcohol and smoking more tobacco in the North. Smoking has dropped 13 percent here in the North, but in the South it has dropped 20 percent. The percentage of regular drinkers grew 9 percent in the North compared to less than 6 percent in the South. And the percentage of obese or overweight Northerners increased 10 percent as compared with only 7 percent in the South.

For all of the millions of dollars we put into prevention, the numbers are not getting any better, with the exception of our smoking rates. The bottom line is healthy choices. We need a balanced diet. We need to be exercising more. We need to avoid excessive tobacco and alcohol consumption. The time to conduct research into chronic disease prevention is now. We must act while the problem is still relatively limited in scope.

I will have questions for the Minister of Health and Social Services at the appropriate time.