

Lake is new B.C. health minister

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Terry Lake was appointed Minister of Health in the Cabinet of British Columbia Premier Christy Clark last Friday. The former environment minister moved into the vacancy created by the defeat of incumbent health minister Margaret MacDiarmid in the recent provincial election.

Mr. Lake is a veterinarian by profession and was first elected to the legislature in 2009 after completing a four-year term as Mayor of the City of Kamloops. He was Parliamentary Secretary for Health Promotion before his appointment as environment minister.

His mandate letter from Premier Clark says she expects him "to live within the funding envelope" provided in the last budget "while at the same time continuing to innovate and improve patient services." It is a message the new minister has already absorbed.

"I'm going to have to get used to saying, 'No, we have to live within our means,'" he told the Kamloops Daily News after his appointment.

The mandate letter is an 11-point to-do list for the minister, and includes fully implementing the province's 10-year plan to address mental health and substance abuse. Introduced in November 2010, the plan was immediately criticized for lacking concrete steps to achieve its goals. A report by the province's children's advocate two months ago said the mental health system for teens is "fractured ... confusing and frustrating."

Also on the list is the completion of the laboratory reform initiative (which will see the consolidation of certain services in single sites), increasing the scope of practice for nurse practitioners and doubling the number of hospice spaces in the province by 2020.

Assisting Mr. Lake is Linda Larson as his parliamentary secretary for seniors, and Michelle Stilwell as parliamentary secretary for healthy living. There is also a new deputy minister of health — Stephen Brown who replaces Graham Whitmarsh.

The mandate letter can be found at

www.gov.bc.ca/premier/cabinet_ministers/terry_lake_mandate_letter.pdf