

Manitoba PFD Loan Program

In 2006, Manitoba launched a water safety program with the goal of reducing the frequency of drowning incidents in Manitoba's northern communities. By increasing the use of personal floatation devices (PFDs) by people on or near the water and increasing both awareness and importance of acquiring personal water survival skills, lives could be saved.

Manitoba Healthy Living partnered with the Manitoba Coalition for Safer Waters to offer a PFD Loan Program to communities in the North. Under this program, communities receive a supply of Personal Floatation Devices (PFDs) and set up a loan program, similar to a library, where local residents borrow PFDs for use during various water activities.

The PFD loan program is funded by Manitoba Healthy Living. In 2006, \$50,000 was received by the Coalition to run the program including the purchase and shipping of PFDs. Based on the popularity, demand and early success, another \$50,000 was provided in 2007 to continue the program. Manitoba Healthy Living also made a substantial purchase of radio advertising time. These popular recorded water safety messages were made available by the Lifesaving Society. They aired around the province, but primarily in strategic market areas.

The loaner program was promoted through many newsletters including IMPACT on Injuries and Community Contact (newsletter of Manitoba Aboriginal and Northern Affairs), personal contact, and through print and radio media. The Lifesaving Society of Manitoba also promoted the program.

Instructors demonstrated their life saving values during local swim and boat safety classes, as part of the Northern Water Smart® Program.

In 2006, 20 northern communities successfully applied for the PFD Loaner Program. Each of these communities received a supply of PFD in child, youth and adult sizes. 2007 saw another 21 applications for PFDs. A total of 1,122 PFDs have been distributed to date.

In late fall of 2006, IMPACT, the injury prevention centre of

Children's Hospital surveyed the communities regarding their experiences with the program. Many communities did not have their programs fully operational as there was initially a

Background

In 2004, the Healthy Kids, Healthy Futures All-Party Task Force Report made two recommendations for improving water safety in Manitoba:

- "the provincial government work with the Coalition for Safer Waters and other partners to adopt and implement a provincial Water Safety and Drowning Prevention Strategy that is consistent with the Provincial Injury Strategy Framework
- the provincial government work with First Nations communities and the Coalition for Safer Waters to address water safety issues for Aboriginal children and youth".

In 2005, Manitoba Injury Drowning Prevention Strategy recommended making water safety and drowning prevention a priority for injury prevention. A sub-goal was to ensure that Manitobans have reasonable access to effective water safety and drowning prevention programs. An analysis of existing services and drowning rates demonstrated that there was a need for services in the north where there is a high rate of drowning.

problem with shipping and they did not get their PFDs until late September. A total of 67 PFD had been loaned out and one community reported that all of the PFDs had been loaned out many times. Many communities reported that they required XXL sized PFDs for their residents. In order of frequency, the PFDs were loaned out for the following water activities: Boating, fishing hunting, child safety, canoeing, canoe instruction and travelling. The 2007 review is currently underway.

For more information on Manitoba's PFD Loaner Program or northern water safety, contact:

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