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How to Improve the Health of Low-Income Children: C.D. Howe Institute

May 7, 2009 – Improving the health of children in low-income families, which is chronically worse than that of richer children, requires well-targeted policy reforms, according to a study released today by the C.D. Howe Institute. In *Good Health to All: Reducing Health Inequalities among Children in High- and Low-Income Canadian Families*, C.D. Howe Research Fellow Claire de Oliveira identifies the policies that would, for families across different income groups, best address inequality in the health of children.

Dr. de Oliveira finds that the health and education of parents play a more significant role in determining children's health status than household income. Moreover, since large transfers of income to relatively poor households would be needed to have a substantial impact on children's health outcomes, such income-related policies should be de-emphasized in favour of in-kind transfers of goods and services from the provinces.

Specific recommendations include:

- implementing policies that improve and promote the health of parents and the awareness of healthy lifestyles;
- evaluating the implementation of in-kind transfers – healthy breakfasts and lunches, for example – through the school system;
- improving the National Child Benefit by broadening the range of services delivered under the program;
- providing a more consistent network of health services at the provincial level; and,
- where possible, making children, rather than their parents, the direct recipients of in-kind transfers.

The benefits of improving children's health, she notes, are long-lasting for the children – and for Canada's economy. In particular, she suggests that better health outcomes in childhood could have a significant impact on adult outcomes in the form of higher educational attainment, better labour market outcomes and better health.

The study *Good Health to All: Reducing Health Inequalities among Children in High- and Low-Income Canadian Families* is available at www.cdhowe.org

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Good Health to All: Reducing Health Inequalities among Children in High- and Low-Income Canadian Families C.D. Howe Institute Commentary No. 288, by Claire de Oliveira (May 2009). 21 pp; \$12.00 (prepaid, plus postage & handling and GST – please contact the Institute for details). ISBN 0-88806-759-3.

Copies are available from: Renouf Publishing Company Limited, 5369 Canotek Road, Ottawa, Ontario K1J 9J3; or directly from the C.D. Howe Institute, 67 Yonge St., Suite 300, Toronto, Ontario M5E 1J8. The full text of this publication is also available from the Institute's website at www.cdhowe.org.