

MEDIA RELEASE

Canadian Mental Health Association Alberta Division

328 Capital Place, 9707 – 110 Street NW
Edmonton, AB T5K 2L9

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Edmonton, Alberta, October 18, 2004-

CMHA Alberta Division Elects New President

A leading litigation lawyer who served as Alberta's Ombudsman was elected President of the Canadian Mental Health Association's Alberta Division on the weekend. Aleck Trawick, Q.C., counsel to Blake, Cassels & Graydon LLB in Calgary, was elected on a platform of working to strengthen the Association's political influence.

"Alberta is on the cusp of having the most progressive mental health system in Canada" said Trawick, "but the plan is stalled; in spite of leadership by Health Minister Gary Mar, it appears to be mired in political indecision."

According to Trawick, there seems to be no will to fund a plan that has the potential "to serve sick people better, to keep communities safe, and to save millions in the long run." Citing the Calgary criminal justice diversion program as an example, he noted that hundreds of sick people who committed minor crimes were moved from police, court and jail processes, saving taxpayers millions while providing better service. "Clients and families are pleased, the police are pleased and the courts are pleased" said Trawick. "Yet the government has not committed to ongoing funding. Services for people with a mental illness still seem not to be priority," he added.

"If this program were cancer-related", said the new President, "support would not be an issue." Trawick plans to mobilize thousands of the Association's clients, staff and volunteers in the provincial election widely expected to be held later this Fall.

"Twenty percent of Albertans will suffer a mental illness at some time in their life" said Trawick. "If they can be mobilized, we will have a formidable force - governments will listen."

The Canadian Mental Health Association is one of Canada's oldest and largest citizen's organizations with programs of research, education, direct service and advocacy. The CMHA has offices throughout Alberta with annual expenditures of \$11 million.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:

Mr. Aleck Trawick, Q.C.
Phone: 403-260-9600
Fax: 403-260-9700

- or -

Mr. Peter Portlock, Associate Executive Director
Phone: 780-482-6576
Fax: 780-482-6348