

April 17, 2007

## **New approach aims to improve treatment of mental illness in the community**

*Edmonton...* Amendments to Alberta's *Mental Health Act* and accompanying measures to enhance community-based mental health services will help Albertans living with mental illness and their families to access early intervention services, prevent deterioration, and enjoy a better quality of life.

Tony Abbott, MLA Drayton Valley-Calmar, introduced Bill 31, *Mental Health Amendment Act, 2007* on April 17 in the legislature. If passed, the legislation will require physicians to provide treatment recommendations to a patient's family physician when that patient is discharged from care.

"I am proud to support Bill 31 as these amendments to the *Mental Health Act* will help get earlier treatment for Albertans suffering from mental illness," said Abbott. "Changes to the Act will provide valuable assistance to these individuals, their families and their communities and will be an important component of mental health care in our province."

Another proposed amendment will allow community treatment orders (CTOs). CTOs must be issued by two physicians, one of whom must be a psychiatrist. CTOs encourage treatment in the community and provide a less intrusive alternative to hospital admission. Each case will be addressed on an individual basis to ensure resources are in place to support treatment.

Health regions are responsible for delivery of mental health services and operate a network of more than 85 community mental health clinics across the province. Provincial and regional health plans also promote community options, and enhanced community services are encouraged through the Mental Health Innovation Fund.

"Treatment in the community will translate into a better quality of life for Albertans battling mental illness," said Dave Hancock, Minister of Health and Wellness. "While community treatment orders are an important tool that will help to encourage compliance with prescribed treatment, they should be viewed as an extreme measure. Our immediate priority is to ensure availability of the support services required for Albertans suffering from serious mental illness to lead full, independent and productive lives. In a well-functioning mental health system, CTOs should rarely be necessary."

If passed, a steering committee with appropriate representatives from stakeholder groups will be established to assist in implementation of the bill and to provide feedback on essential community services. The committee will work with government in the development of options for a province-wide approach to assertive community treatment of mental illness.

"The goal is to ensure we reach out and provide the necessary assistance to those in need before their condition deteriorates to the point where they require re-hospitalization," Hancock said. "In addition, we will assist community-based organizations and consumer groups in providing education, information and support to patients and their families."

Strengthening treatment of mental illness in the community supports Premier Stelmach's plan to improve Albertans' quality of life.

- 30 -

**Media enquiries may be directed to:** Joanne Adamyk, Health and Wellness Communications, (780) 427 7164  
To call toll-free within Alberta dial 310 0000.