

MEDIA RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NO REAL MENTAL HEALTH SYSTEM IN ALBERTA - ACCORDING TO PROVINCIAL HEALTH COUNCIL

***CMHA* CMHA President Calls for Action**

Edmonton, Alberta, January 12, 1999—

"Many people with mental illness are living on the edge of disaster," says Dennis Anderson, President of the Alberta Division of the Canadian Mental Health Association. Anderson was responding to the Provincial Health Council of Alberta's special report on mental health issues, which was recently published, but not released to the media.

"The Council has got it right — Alberta has no overall plan or shared vision of comprehensive services for the 20% of Albertans at risk for mental illness in their lifetime," said Anderson. According to the Health Council Report, "fragmentation has led to less effective services and serious inefficiencies throughout Alberta's mental health system."

"I respectfully ask the Health Minister to act quickly on the Council's recommendations," Anderson said.

Those recommendations include:

- ?? **No new capital expenditures for mental health hospitals** before the role of community care versus institutional care is addressed. The Council noted that "very substantial new funding" would be required to refurbish these facilities. [CMHA has been advised that the Provincial Mental Health Advisory Board plans to completely rebuild the two major facilities.] The Council report implies that if emphasis on mental health care was shifted to general hospitals, mental health clinics and community agencies, the amount of funds needed for mental health hospitals will be reduced. The Council report stated that announcing new capital expenditures for mental health hospitals without announcing more funding for community services sends a powerful message about the intended focus of mental health reform.
- ?? **Increased funding for children's mental health.** The council noted that generally "insufficient funding is an issue," but was not prepared to recommend increased funding over and above the recent \$10 million recommended by the Health System Funding Review Committee, until the issues of mental health system fragmentation and lack of service integration are dealt with.
- ?? **That the Minister of Health change the mandate and membership of the Provincial Mental Health Advisory Board** to "act as a champion and advocate for mental health services and clients" and to eventually eliminate its service delivery role.
- ?? **Overall, the Health Council recommended that the mental health system start from an "individual focus that will lead to a stronger, more citizen-focused system" and that there is a need to "regain the energy invested in mental health reform" previously.**

The Canadian Mental Health Association believes that this report confirms its longstanding concerns about the lack of commitment to mental health reform. "The current mental health system is not sensitive to the needs of people with serious mental disorders," said Anderson.

"We have become increasingly concerned as we see lengthy waiting lists and little action on mental health reform. I will be asking the Minister for an early meeting to press this point," said Anderson.

The Health Council report, *Mental Health in Alberta — Issues and Recommendations*, is available from the Provincial Health Council, 8th Floor, Peace Hills Trust Tower, 10011 - 109 Street, Edmonton AB T5J 3S8, or from the Alberta Division of the Canadian Mental Health Association.

Dennis Anderson is available by telephone at 434-2146.