

eFACTS



— DECEMBER 11, 2000



eFACTS, a summary of current newsworthy facts and effects, is circulated regularly to the Divisional Board, Regional Presidents and senior staff. We thought you should know:

1. The Provincial Legislature ended its Fall term with no debate or proposals regarding mental health reform - not that any were expected. The session was expected to be light and to avoid controversies in anticipation of an election and apparently ended prematurely because of the Utilities/Energy controversy.
2. Alberta's Energy Rebate Program may please some, but inner-city agencies in Edmonton report chaos, as troubled people with addictions binge on new found money. Very difficult behaviour and at least three deaths have been reported. On a positive note, the refunds which are to be received by people on the Alberta Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) will not result in any reduction in their disability benefits.
3. The Health and Wellness Minister has done an "about turn" on Health information. One item of discussion during the Legislative sitting was the Health Information Act which the Minister of Health acknowledged was delayed following representation from our Health Information Partnership. Following the Ministers agreement to delay the proclamation into law, the partnership of the Alberta Medical Association, the United Nurses of Alberta, the BC Freedom of Information Association and the CMHA, began developing detailed position papers including specific recommendations for legislative, regulatory and implementation amendments. Then on December 4th the Minister wrote the partnership saying he would not consider amendments and planned to proclaim the legislation in mid-January. The group will now examine next steps, including the potential for a Charter challenge.
4. The Alberta Mental Health Board meets monthly and at their meeting of December 1st they considered a number of items:
 - 4.1 Noted that their Business Plan was approved by the Minister of Health

and reported he “commended” them for their direction and priorities.

- 4.2 Announced a multi-department initiative with Justice to pursue programs of diversion for mentally disordered offenders.
- 4.3 Approved cost of living increases for non-union employees, effective April, 2001.
- 4.4 Reported that consolidating benefits and contracting legal services has saved over 400,000.
- 4.5 Approved a 5% cost of living increase for funded agencies. An earlier increase this year was not approved and advanced in error. Funded programs will now be “topped up.”
- 4.6 Approved changes at the Raymond Care Centre which will see a greater emphasis on seniors and a reduction in the community residences from 30 to 12 beds.
- 4.7 Quarterly financial statements reflect a budget surplus of \$15 million mid-year, although the money is expected to be spent by year end.

Other items were financial and organizational in nature and therefore of little public interest.

5. A Review Panel under the Mental Health Act recently decided to require a “competent” patient to undergo electric shock treatment in spite of her vehement objections. She obtained a lawyer who approached CMHA to support her position through a Charter Challenge. As CMHA and the client’s lawyers prepared to go to trial, the woman’s “certificates” were cancelled which means treatment won’t be forced and of course made the Court challenge “moot.” Although this patient was protected, no precedent has been set to protect future situations where people who are competent to make decisions, are able to refuse unwanted intrusive treatments.
6. “People With Psychiatric Disabilities Can’t Get Home Care.” This conclusion from a National CMHA study which included pilot projects in Ottawa, St. John’s and Taber, Alberta, will be released at a series of news conferences held across Canada on December 12. The Taber situation was better than other parts of Canada but researchers from Queen’s University found systematic discrimination in Home Care. The detailed report is available from National CMHA with more information on the National web-site @ www.cmha.ca or contact CMHA’s Alberta South region at 1- 403 -329-4775.
7. Alberta Justice has announced enhanced mental health services for young offenders. The Department will spend \$1 million this year and \$2.5 next. The funds are to be used to improve training and expand assessment and counselling services with a particular focus on female and aboriginal offenders. The project is apparently in response to recent public concern and recommendations from the

Children's Forums, activities in which CMHA members were involved.

8. The Alberta Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health held a successful "Open House" on December 6. Attended by Health Minister Gary Mar and Muttart Foundation Executive Director Bob Wyatt, the Alliance acknowledged the support of the Foundation and a "new era of partnership" between the Health Minister and the Alliance.
9. The CMHA "Pet Therapy" project received 3/4 page coverage in the "Living" section of the Edmonton Journal on December 11. CFRN Television will also air a special on this date. The stories detail the genesis for the project and hoped for outcomes. Funding is still being sought.
10. A recent Harvard University Study found that 41% of people with mental illnesses smoke compared with 22% in the general public. Tobacco appears to induce a relaxing effect and is also known to cause drugs to metabolize more quickly, so any stop smoking plan should be done in consultation with a physician.

Season's Greetings to all!

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