



— APRIL 9, 2001

eFACTS, a summary of current newsworthy *facts* and *effects*, is made available to people who have a continuing interest in mental health reform in Alberta. We thought you should know:

1. The Alberta Legislature goes into session on Monday the 9th, with the Speech from the Throne on Tuesday. It is expected to be a short, uncontentious session focusing on energy rebates, agriculture and roads. CMHA does expect a repeat of the commitment to mental health services which appeared in the Throne Speech just prior to the election. What that means in concrete terms is yet to be seen.
2. The mid-March request for meeting with the Alberta Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health has not yet been formally responded to by the Health and Wellness Minister, although an early meeting is expected. The outcome of this meeting will to a large extent determine the government's stated commitment to mental health reform.
3. Alberta Health and Wellness has restructured once again changing some of the responsibilities of all five Divisions. The key section dealing with mental health has been renamed Population Health from Health Strategies. As mentioned in the last eFACTS, Art McIntyre is Acting Assistant Deputy Minister.
4. A new Division, "Strategic Planning," has a new Deputy Minister — Mr. Jim McKendrick, who comes from Extendicare Inc.
5. The government's Standing Policy Committees have been restructured and renamed. As reported previously, Mary O'Neill of St. Albert will Chair the SPC on Health and Community Living (formerly Health and Safe Communities). This group is responsible to make recommendations on health and wellness, seniors' issues, children's services, community development, aboriginal affairs and northern development. The committee has fourteen members, including five Ministers in the related areas and nine back-benchers.

6. Author Scott Simmie has just released his book, *The Last Taboo* — “a survival guide to mental health care in Canada.” CMHA National describes it as “the best and most practical book ever written about mental illness and mental health in Canada.” It is available in bookstores.
7. The Alberta Centre for Injury Control dedicated 25% of it’s April issue to suicide using data from CMHA’s programs. The data details trends in both means and rates. Interestingly, the use of firearms has dropped and hanging/strangulation/suffocation have increased, and for the last reporting year were the most common means of suicide. More information is available from SIEC (phone: 403-245-3900; Internet: <http://www.siec.ca>).
8. The government has still not proclaimed the controversial Health Information Act detailed in previous editions of eFACTS. The Ontario legislation, which is very similar to Alberta’s, has been withdrawn following vigorous opposition from the same groups opposing the Alberta Act. In fact, the Federal Privacy Commissioner, after reviewing the Ontario Act at the request of the Ontario Government, described it as “an assault on health privacy rights, not a defence of them.” The Alberta struggle continues.
9. The new report from the Premier’s Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities, *Full Citizenship*, has much to say about the need to improve conditions for the disabled — including those people with mental disabilities. It closely parallels CMHA philosophy and could help advance the need for personal supports, education/learning and employment/income. Copies will be available shortly from the Council at 301 Garneau Professional Building, 11044 - 82 Avenue, Edmonton, AB T6G 0T2 (phone: 780-422-1095). The Council incidently has government-appointed members whose terms expire in August. CMHA members should be encouraged to apply. Although the Council does not like “single issue candidates,” CMHA’s goals apply to all disability groups.
10. Remember as well to encourage CMHA advocates to contest this fall’s Health Authority elections. Mental health issues need to be at those tables.
11. IMS Canada, an independent organization that tracks drug sales, has reported that Canadians go to physicians for depression more often than any other ailment except high blood pressure. Canadians bought

291 million prescriptions last year (an average nine prescriptions per person), costing \$11 billion. Psychotherapeutics, including anti-depressants, were the second most frequently dispensed class of drugs after cardiovascular medicine. Mental health and heart disease are also known to have a direct link.

12. Perhaps coincidentally, CMHA's booklet *Heart and Stroke — Coping with Stress*, developed in partnership with the Heart and Stroke Foundation, has apparently taken on a renewed public interest thanks to the Edmonton Public School Board. Copies of the booklet are available from CMHA National.
13. The Alberta Hospital Edmonton is sponsoring a one-day workshop, *Vocational Services Merges Into Light*, building on the CMHA Mental Health Week theme. The conference focuses on the very important rehabilitative component of work and has good speakers like Dr. Bonnie Kirsh from the University of Toronto. More information from Pat Goldsmith in Staff Development at the hospital.

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