



— JUNE 12, 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 ended the current session on May 31 with no announced measures to address the Throne Speech commitment to “meet the unique needs of persons with mental health issues,” except perhaps for the \$16 million in new funds approved for the Alberta Mental Health Board. Health spending now totals \$6.27 billion, over 29% of all government spending. Proportionately, mental health spending does poorly. During the budget estimate debate, Liberal MLA Debbie Carlson made a lengthy and spirited push for more money for community care, using as resource material the information provided to all MLA’s by the Alberta Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health (AAMIMH).
2. The Residential Care Housing Committee Act proposed by Tory MLA Karen Kryzka to ensure the protection of vulnerable Albertans living in Care Homes passed Second Reading, but was then defeated. The reasons remain unclear; however, Private Members’ Bills rarely become law. Of note, a number of Tory MLAs supported the Bill.
3. On June 2, Health Minister Mar passed a Ministerial Order extending the appointments of the Alberta Mental Health Board’s Chair and two other members until September 30, 2001, then noting that all members will be “subject to earlier termination at the discretion of the Minister.” While the Minister’s Executive staff suggested nothing should be concluded from the announcement, the decision may herald some significant changes over the summer. The Alberta Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health has called for a restructuring of the Board to focus on standards, monitoring, funding and advocacy with service delivery managed by Regional Health Authorities. The Chair of the

AAMIMH met again with the Minister in May, as did a number of the Alliance member organizations, and reported the Minister's comments to be "promising." "Stay tuned," as it is said!

4. The Alberta Mental Health Board last met on May 18. Of note were:
 - 4.1 A Framework for Inter-Regional Collaboration, proposed by the Council of Chairs of the Regional Health Authorities and Provincial Boards in April 2001. The Framework identified some principles (the philosophical framework) to guide the behaviour of RHAs in their interactions with each other; recognized that province-wide approaches must reflect local realities; and identified some potential opportunities for inter-regional co-operation (such as information technology, labour relations/ negotiations, joint programming and cross-boundary service delivery, recruitment and long-term care).
 - 4.2 The Board decided to reappoint the legal firm of Bryan & Company, which has been providing general legal services to the AMHB since spring 2000, for another two years.
 - 4.3 The AMHB is likely to produce a discussion paper this summer dealing with the Consumer Advisory Council appointments.
 - 4.4 The Board noted increased tele-mental health activity over the past year. The AMHB has a lead role in developing a centralized scheduling system for tele-health in concert with the CRHA.

The next meeting (via video-conference) is this Friday, June 15 at 10:00 a.m. in Edmonton's Telus Plaza. The public can attend.

5. Yet another Health Commission has been named. On May 30, Minister Mar announced a five-member Commission Chaired by MLA Bonnie Laing. Other members are to be named. The group will make recommendations to the Minister on "continuous improvement in the performance of the health system." The Commission will look at how services are delivered, while the earlier-appointed Premier's Advisory Council on Health is looking at the "future" of health care.
6. On May 23 the government announced a review of Child Welfare legislation, chaired by Calgary MLA Harvey Cenaiko. A major review has

not occurred for 17 years, although some changes were initiated in 1988, 1994 and 1997. Included in the review will be laws relating to protection, adoption, handicapped services and the role of the Children's Advocate (the Advocate has been publicly highly critical of government in recent years).

7. Yet more reviews. On June 7 the government announced a review of low income programs, chaired by Edmonton MLA Thomas Lukaszuk. The review will include the Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped program (AISH) and is a welcome development. The timing is also good as CMHA is currently working with the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities and others to develop recommendations relating to AISH. A disconcerting part of the announcement is the Internet poll to determine if Albertans think the poor and handicapped deserve more. The government's job is to study the problem and come up with a fair solution, not to check the political winds.
8. The Health Information Act opposed by the Health Information Partnership (CMHA, the AMA and the UNA) is now being implemented, and both the Information and Privacy Commissioner and the Department of Health and Wellness have just released detailed training information. The material is being reviewed by the Partnership, as previous material was considered to be inaccurate and misleading. Alternate material may be developed and an AMA-sponsored toll-free phone line will soon allow both the public and professionals to detail concerns.
9. CMHA is participating on an advisory group to the Department of Human Resources and Employment in order to recommend policies which will better address the needs of disabled Albertans who wish to work. The advisory group will influence a provincial consultation with consumers and professionals. A report for the Minister will be available by year end.
10. The University of Washington Medical School has a new web site about the human brain. Check it out at <http://thalamus.wustl.edu/course/>
11. Ron LaJeunesse will be on leave courtesy of the Muttart Foundation, to redraft his book, *Political Asylums*. It is hoped the book will be published this fall. He will be away until July 15, returning for two weeks and then leaving until August 18. Provincial staffing

responsibilities have been modified, with David Allen supported by psychologist George Lucki, who is already active with the AAMIMH and was last year's CMHA recipient of the Professional Care Award. More information is available upon request.

For more information, phone 482-6576.

*Alberta Division
Canadian Mental Health Association
328 Capital Place, 9707 - 110 Street NW
Edmonton, AB T5K 2L9*

*Phone: (780) 482-6576; Fax: (780) 482-6348
E-mail: division@cmha.ab.ca
Web site: <http://www.cmha.ab.ca>*