

eFACTS



— OCTOBER 2, 2001

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

1. The unbelievable events of September 11 will undoubtedly have a prolonged psychological effect on people worldwide. While anxiety and grief are very natural responses to the horror, some people will be more dramatically affected than others. To prevent future problems at least three actions are critical. One: Talk about your feelings and confide in those you trust. Two: When talking, be aware who is listening. Children need a clear and simple explanation and reassurance that they are safe. Third: Don't discriminate against groups for the actions of individuals. If tension and anxiety persist, seek more information or professional help. The CMHA web site at www.cmha.ab.ca has several resources on depression and anxiety (including post-traumatic stress disorder), and the Alberta Mental Health Board's (AMHB) "Help Line" at 1-877-303-2642 can refer you.
2. During wartime, the use of mental health services has historically dropped. The same appears to have occurred after September 11. Information from the managers of two large AMHB clinics would indicate calls for help actually decreased, in spite of additional publicity by the AMHB for their help line. That line, however, did receive an average of 30 more calls per day, mostly from seniors. Utilization, however, often increases *after* trauma or conflict.
3. The highly-rumoured changes to the leadership of the Alberta Mental Health Board by September 30 did not occur. Chair Betty Schoenhofer and two of her more experienced colleagues were reappointed on September 27 for six months. In July the Minister advised CMHA's Executive Director that significant changes would not occur until 2002.

4. The Alberta Mental Health Board met on September 28 and considered a number of matters, although most were administrative in nature.
 - a) Approved new policies regarding the retention of records, with full records now limited to 10 years. Some records now date back to the hospital's opening in 1923.
 - b) Financial reports reflect a \$20 million surplus on operations, with a budgeted surplus for the current year of \$1 million, although a year-end surplus is apparently not expected. Revenue was up almost \$20 million over last year.
 - c) Previous problems with financial controls identified by the Provincial Auditor General are being worked on.
 - d) The tele-mental health four-year pilot and evaluation were reported as positive, with high utilization through 118 sites by year-end. The challenge will now be to continue funding ,with many of the existing resources being "one-time" in nature.
5. The Alberta Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health, the coalition of organizations promoting mental health reform, held an important strategies meeting on September 19 and will meet again October 4 to finalize the plan. The most important considerations were the slow pace of mental health reform and proposed action, which could advance the declared government commitments. The group also worked on plans for a significant conference on "best practices" to be held in the fall of 2002. The group's membership was expanded to include the Association of Marriage and Family Therapists.
6. Three of the preliminary actions approved by the Alliance at their September 19 meeting, were a presentation to the Alberta Medical Association's (AMA) "Representative Forum" asking for support for AAMIMH policies (resoundingly endorsed), additional meetings with the Premier's Council on the Future of Health Care (planned for October 3), and a meeting with the full Board of the AMHB (planned for October 19).
7. The AMHB has approved funding increases to non-profit contracted agencies (including CMHA) of 5% of salary excluding benefits. While below CMHA's requested inflation increases, the support comes at a

time when government is planning to reduce expenditures. The decision is perhaps in some way, recognition of the Year of Volunteers.

8. The Royal Canadian Mint has just issued a new dime to commemorate volunteers in Canada. About the same time, Statistics Canada issued a report, "Caring Canadians, Involved Canadians," which showed volunteer ranks dropped by 13% (about a million people in 2000 over the previous year). The fewer volunteers also appear to be doing more with the average 162 hours, up from 149 in 1997. Dollar contributions have, however, increased by 11% since 1997. Interestingly, Alberta and three Atlantic provinces had the highest rate of giving.
9. The Alberta Health and Wellness 2000/2001 Annual Report was released September 28. The report includes "highlights" on key priorities, and mental health programs do not appear as an achievement the government is proud of. The only reference to a mental health issue was that "suicide rates have changed very little since 1997." For more information contact www.health.gov.ab.ca
10. The Alberta Mental Health Board's review of Alberta's suicide programs appears to be moving smoothly under the leadership of Chris LaForge. The community initiatives component has been completed and the evaluation Of CMHA's information and education services is about to begin. The CMHA programs have been adapted in many parts of the world and have led to major prevention policies with the World Health Organization and the US Government. Australia is now implementing the programs with very positive reviews. Another import from Canada is, however, a little less positive: many Aussie suicide-seekers are apparently ordering a Canadian-made "suicide kit," which includes a customized plastic bag and a guide to suicide drugs.
11. The Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities is also undergoing a review. Senior staff members Tony Hudson and Brian Sandilands have left, and their leadership will be missed throughout the disability community.
12. Alberta's Children's Advocate issued a scathing report on Alberta's child welfare system as he left the position for retirement. The government was clearly unhappy with the report, and Children's

Services Minister, Iris Evans, issued a detailed response. The government knew the report was coming and asked the government committee responsible for reviewing the Child Welfare Act (chaired by Calgary MLA Harvey Cenaiko) to review the role and reporting relationship of the Advocate. For a copy of the report, you may contact the Children's Advocate at 780-427-8934.

13. The Alberta Brain Injury Initiative that CMHA has been promoting for years continues to move along -- albeit slowly. A four-member Implementation Advisory Council chaired by former Cabinet member Connie Osterman has been appointed. CMHA encouraged an appointment from our membership, and CMHA Central Region Executive member Pat Marshall joins Suzanne Vallhally and Hildegard Campsall, a long-time supporter of CMHA.
14. The Ministry of Seniors has announced \$20 million for supportive housing in this fiscal year. The program, which was previously administered by Health and Wellness through the Regional Health Authorities, is now available directly to non-profit organizations. The program supports seniors' independence, and most of last year's allocation of \$10 million went to projects in smaller Alberta centres. More information at www.gov.ab.ca/200109/11290.html
15. The Ministry of Human Resources and Employment has announced that more low-income families will be eligible for free health benefits such as dental, drugs and eye care for children under 18. For information contact any CMHA office or phone 780-427-6348, or e-mail achb@gov.ab.ca
16. CMHA is on an advisory panel to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment Steering Group, reviewing training policies and practices. The hope is to provide improved help to get disabled people into the workforce. If you have had an experience (good or bad) with current programs, you can participate in a survey by calling 1-888-297-4776, or by e-mailing mrfield@bowvalleyc.ab.ca
17. Grants to community groups for injury prevention (including suicide) are available from the Alberta Centre for Injury Prevention and Control (ACICR). Grants will be between \$5,000 and \$10,000 and the deadline for submission is October 31. More information at 780-492-9766, or e-mail mandy.fisher@ualberta.ca/acicr

18. A reminder to our readers that the CMHA Alberta Division Annual General Meeting (AGM) and Awards Ceremony follows the annual Schizophrenia Conference on October 12 at the Coast Terrace Inn, Edmonton. The public is invited. For more information, contact Jillian at 780-482-6576. Information on the Schizophrenia Conference should be directed to 1-780-472-5438. A second reminder that the CMHA Central Region is holding their AGM on the evening of October 2. Information is available at 403-342-2266. The only remaining 1999/2000 AGMs are in South Region, planned for October 16 in Lethbridge (phone 403-329-4775) and in North East Region, planned for Feb 12, 2002 in Fort McMurray.
19. Conferences!
- a) Final notice for the "Taking Control in Our Communication" conference on rural mental health to be presented by the Pincher Creek Branch of CMHA on November 3rd. Phone 403-627-2726 to register, or e-mail cmhafc@telusplanet.net
 - b) The Third Annual Children's Mental Health Conference will be held on October 24 to 26 at the Capri Centre in Red Deer. For more information call 1-866-441-3840 or 403-241-3840 or e-mail laurel@cadvision.com
 - c) Edmonton's Lousage Institute is sponsoring a well-timed conference on recent developments in the treatment of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. It will be held November 30 to December 1 in Calgary. For more information call 1-888-Lousage or 780-488-7679.
 - d) CMHA Ontario Division is co-sponsoring a major conference on managing legal risks in mental health care, to be held November 29 and 30 in Toronto. For more information call 1-877-927-7936 or visit www.CanadianInstitute.com
 - e) CMHA BC Division is sponsoring a conference with the Canadian Institute, on managing privacy of health information in Western Canada, to be held on November 19 and 20 in Vancouver. More information at 1-877-927-7936, or visit www.CanadianInstitute.com

20. Resources!

- a) Family Services Canada has developed an interactive Internet site on bullying, designed for children ages two to four. Go to www.talk-helps.com
- b) AADAC has mounted a highly interactive pilot web site aimed at youth. Topics include facts on drugs and gambling, self-esteem and adolescent fears. Visit the site at www.aadac.4kids.com

21. Remember that Mental Illness Awareness Week is October 7 to 13. For details visit any CMHA web site (www.cmha.ab.ca) and link to "National," or visit our partners with the Canadian Psychiatric Association at www.cpa-apc.org The AMHB will also be announcing Phase III of a Public Awareness Campaign on Mental Illness on October 9 with the Honourable Lois Hole. For more information contact Sheri Gauthier at 780-917-4107.

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