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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 last edition of eFACTS reported that the Premier's Council on the Future of Health Care (Mazankowski Report) recommended the divestment of the Alberta Mental Health Board to the Regional Health Authorities. In late January the government announced it would accept the recommendation, and on March 4, Health and Wellness Minister Mar met with representatives of the AMHB and informed them that "effective immediately, all administrative, human resource and financial programs, services or practices of the Board are frozen." Assistant Deputy Minister Wayne McKendrick was then appointed as the Minister's representative, "Pursuant to Section #9 of the Government Organization Act." The AMHB's CEO, Ken Sheehan, is not at work "for personal reasons," and "no date has been set for his return." Mr. Mark Ewan, Executive Director of Provincial Services, remains in charge.
2. What happens next? The Minister indicated he would be appointing a consultant to oversee the divestment process, although one has yet to be named. AMHB staff are in an understandable state of anxiety as to their future, with little information from corporate office.
3. Following the release of the Mazankowski Report, both the Board of the AMHB and members of the Alberta Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health were active, meeting with media and politicians. Board members and senior AMHB staff attempted to cause a delay in the government's acceptance of the recommendations, while Alliance members pressed for early divestment AND a formal commitment to a reconstituted Board with powers to oversee the delivery of services.

4. The appointment of the Honourable Anne McLellan as Federal Minister of Health could be good for our cause. The new Minister knows Alberta, is vitally interested in mental health issues, supported the CMHA initiative for diversion of the mentally ill from jail and has personal connections with many CMHA members.
5. The Alberta government has now detailed a time frame for its plans to implement the Mazankowski Report. By the end of 2002, health premiums will increase, an expert panel will review publicly-funded services, an MLA panel will review "revenue options," population health targets will be set, a Utilization and Outcomes Commission will be established and a public information campaign will promote healthy lifestyles. By the end of 2003 new technologies will be in place, physicians will be asked to accept new pay options, province-wide telephone information will be available (including mental health), and mental health services will be integrated with the regions.
6. The "expert panel" to recommend what services should be publicly funded, could have huge implications for mental health services in the future, and CMHA has pressed for psychiatric expertise and a member of the public with knowledge in the area to sit on the panel (two public members will be appointed from some 120 applicants).
7. The promotion of healthy lifestyles is a key component of the future of health care as seen by both Mazankowski and Health and Wellness Minister Mar. CMHA has a long history in health promotion, and one of the most recent initiatives is a wellness forum, *Juggling Life -- Balancing Wellness*, to be sponsored in Calgary on May 8 and 9 (see the Division web site for more information). The Division is also working with an interagency, multi-disciplinary group to examine priority areas in which government might focus for health promotion and wellness.
8. The Alberta Government's response to the Mazankowski Report is detailed in a document, *Alberta: Health First*. For print copies of that report, contact the Alberta Division. It is also available at [www.gov.ab.ca](http://www.gov.ab.ca) or by phoning 310-4455 toll-free.

9. Want to stay healthy? -- walk. There is growing research evidence that walking vigorously for half-an-hour a day will stave off depression, anxiety, stroke, osteoporosis and high blood pressure. Dr. JoAnn Manson, Chief of Preventive Medicine at Harvard, says if everyone were to walk briskly for those 30 minutes, "we would cut the incidence of many chronic diseases by 30 to 40%."
10. A committee of the AMHB is expected to make recommendations very shortly to institute compulsory community care in Alberta. The controversial law, if accepted by government, would force former patients to take medications and co-operate with community treatment plans. The approach tends to be supported by most psychiatrists and family members and opposed by many consumers and civil libertarians. The CMHA policy acknowledges such a law may be necessary if community services are inadequate, but that a more functional approach is to ensure people receive proper follow-up and support.
11. The new Youth Criminal Justice Act promised in 1993 to replace the Young Offenders Act, became law on February 20 but won't take effect until April 2003. The new Act will be tougher on the most violent 14- and 15-year-olds, fewer youth will go to jail, more supervision will be provided and native youth will receive special consideration. Alberta Justice Minister David Hancock was supportive of most of the provisions. The delay in implementation is to allow provinces the time to prepare for changes.
12. The Schizophrenia Society of Alberta will again host the national conference of the Schizophrenia Society of Canada, June 21 - 23 at Lister Hall on the University of Alberta campus in Edmonton. Entitled *Building Leadership for the Future*, this conference will focus on the needs of the Society's volunteers and staff.
13. The British Journal of Cancer has reported that women prescribed one form of some of the earlier "tricyclic" forms of anti-depressants (TCAs) such as Surmontil show an elevated risk of breast cancer 11 to 15 years later. Other TCAs such as Elavil apparently are not implicated, nor is the current generation of anti-depressants known as "selective serotonin reuptakes" or SSRIs such as Prozac. People who are concerned should discuss the matter with their doctor before discontinuing medication.

14. The January edition of the *Journal of the American Medical Association* reports that the number of Americans being treated for depression tripled (1.8 to 6.3 million) between 1987 and 1997. Many of these individuals are now taking anti-depressant drugs. During the same period, the patients involved in psychotherapy for depression dropped by almost 11%. Psychiatrists expressed concern that we are "throwing pills at problems" while ignoring the underlying causes, but patients report drugs are cheaper, faster and more effective.
15. The Association's North East Region held a successful Annual Meeting in Fort McMurray on February 12 with more than 100 people in attendance. CMHA President Bob Campbell gave a state-of-the-province address, and guest speaker Ron LaJeunesse provided a glimpse into his upcoming book, *Political Asylums*.
16. The Association's North West Region has developed a very ambitious proposal for "Emergency Transitional Homelessness" in Grande Prairie. The project would integrate CMHA services and meet a wide range of community housing needs at a capital cost of \$4.5 million. The volunteers have generated considerable community support and they have already received government (Homeless Initiative Fund) and private commitments that make the project feasible.
17. Aleck Trawick of Blake, Cassels and Graydon in Calgary has provided leadership to the Association's review and recommendations relating to the Health Information Act. Mr. Trawick will be guest speaker at a British Columbia conference on information privacy in early March.
18. Human Resources Canada has announced a new award, the Thérèse Casgrain Volunteer Award, in recognition of volunteers "whose pioneering spirit, social commitment and persistent endeavors have contributed significantly to the advancement of a cause and the well-being of their fellow citizens." We have many volunteers who fit that criteria, and more information is available at  
[www.volunteeraward.gc.ca](http://www.volunteeraward.gc.ca)

For more information contact the Alberta Division of the Canadian Mental Health Association.

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