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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 Alberta government's plan to divest the Alberta Mental Health Board's programs is proceeding under the leadership of a four member "Transition Planning" committee chaired by consultant Mr. Brian Spooner; Mr. Wayne McKendrick, special advisor to the Minister; Health Authority representative Tom Seaman of Medicine Hat and the Mental Health Board's acting CEO Mr. Mark Ewan. (CEO Ken Sheehan is not expected to return to his position.) The focus of the activity is NOT to reform the mental health system, but to divest to the Health Authorities in a manner which will allow reform to proceed at a later date. Initial work then consists principally of six internal committees dealing with finance, service plan models, human resources, capital assets, information systems and legal matters. A second major initiative consists of all regions needing to prepare an inventory of their services. This ambitious project has been attempted unsuccessfully in the past and the deadline of June 1 has not been met by several regions. A commitment has been made regarding the appointment of a new "board" or monitoring body but no decisions have been made regarding the role, composition or power of the new body.
2. The Alberta Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health has met with a representative of the Transition Planning Team and has re-stated three key messages:
  - The need for a formal consultation process with stakeholders during the planning process (under consideration);
  - The requirement for a strong provincial authority to protect the integrity of the system, consistent with AAMIMH policy (copies of the policy are available upon request); and
  - The design of an ongoing advisory system at the regional level. The AAMIMH has also consulted with the Regional Health Authorities regarding the issues that they think are critical to consider during the transition process. A summary of those findings will be detailed for the transition team and Health Minister.

3. A new book entitled "*Political Asylums*", written by CMHA Executive Director Ron LaJeunesse and published by the Muttart Foundation, was released in late May, but the first print run sold out following extensive and complementary publicity in the Edmonton Journal. As of today, a reprint is available through the Centre for Voluntary Action at Edmonton's Grant MacEwan College phone (780) 497-5616 or toll free in Alberta at 1-877-897-5616, at Volunteer Calgary, phone (403) 231-1446, or from any office of the Canadian Mental Health Association in Alberta. The book cost of \$10 is subsidized by the Muttart Foundation and due to tax regulations it cannot be sold commercially in book stores.
4. In late May, the government released its "update on health reform activity." The progress report from the Health Reform implementation team headed by Dr. Larry Ohlhauser, included a brief summary of activity relating to integrating mental health services, plans for a new Kindergarten to Grade 9 Health and Life Skills program and work on a plan to set ten year "targets" in order to reduce rates for major illnesses. The full report can be obtained at [www.healthreform.ca](http://www.healthreform.ca) or by phoning (780) 424-1356.
5. Canada's first ever community health survey on mental health and well being is now underway. Conducted by Statistics Canada, the survey will ask questions about physical and mental well being, factors that affect health and their use of health care services and will occur over the next eight months. Results are expected in the Fall of 2003. Individuals that report distress will be referred to several agencies including the CMHA.
6. The government's long awaited report of the MLA Committee to Review Low Income Programs was released on May 22nd and the recommendations appear to have many positive features, including individualization, flexibility, simplified appeals, work support and improved benefits. Unfortunately, the improved benefits recommendations are not planned to be acted upon until the Fall of this year when the Federal government releases its new Market Basket Measures (MBM), a reflection of basic living costs by region/community. Inflationary increases have not been provided to income support recipients since 1992 (MLA's have received 40% in cumulative increases during that period) and a lobby to encourage an immediate increase for disabled people is underway or being planned by many groups including the Alberta Disability Forum, the Alberta Association for Community Living, the Alberta College of Social Workers and CMHA. Copies of the Low Income Report are available at [www.gov.ab.ca/ahre/lir](http://www.gov.ab.ca/ahre/lir) or by calling 310-4455.
7. In response to the two year old study on brain injury in Alberta, the Alberta Brain Injury Network, operating within the Department of Community Development, has contracted with agencies in six regions across Alberta to provide support, coordination and outreach services to persons with acquired brain injuries. The ten agencies, include a partnership of CMHA and Catholic Social Services in Red Deer. For a full listing of the agencies go to [www.gov.ab.ca/acn/200205/12493.html](http://www.gov.ab.ca/acn/200205/12493.html) or phone (780) 427-4928. The Network has also funded \$750,000 in community based demonstration projects,

and the project descriptions can also be located at the above address or phone number.

8. Between September and December of last year, more than 4000 Albertans were consulted on Alberta's vision for the future. The results of that consultation, which included the Premier's 'Futures Summit' were released May 30. More than a dozen of the recommendations relate to improving the mental health and providing community supports like housing, income, education and research. The value of the voluntary sector is also identified. For a full copy of the vision entitled "Imagine Our Tomorrow," go to [www.futuresummit.com](http://www.futuresummit.com) or phone 780-422-4591.
9. The 2001 report of the Alberta Mental Health Patient Advocate has been released, coinciding with the retirement of Advocate Dr. Mervyn Hislop. Once again the Advocate identifies "shortfalls in both community and inpatient psychiatric services". He also described "profound disappointment in the lack of response to the many overtures made over the years for a more tractable office mandate". CMHA has recommended that the office of the Advocate be rolled into the mandate of a restructured Alberta Mental Health Board.
10. The new Alberta Children's Advocate, faced with dramatic budget cuts, will be cutting key staff positions and instituting a volunteer advocate system. Former Advocate, Bob Rechner, who left the job last year over 'government failure' is highly critical of the plan.
11. The Schizophrenia Society of Alberta will be hosting its National Conference in Edmonton, June 21 to 23. For more information contact the Society at (780) 429-7880 or (780) 452-4661.

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

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