

# ALBERTA



— DECEMBER 20, 2002



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 Legislature ended its fall sitting on December 13 with no consideration of any major health issues. Question Period saw a few questions relating to the Low Income Review, Children's Services and Suicide Prevention programs, and there was of course the controversy regarding health regions, but this session generally focused on other matters, as predicted.
2. The revised health boundaries were announced December 19, although no decision has been made regarding election of boards. In summary: Chinook will stay the same; Medicine Hat will take a portion of Region #5; David Thompson gets part of Region 5, three southern counties from East Central and all of Crossroads; East Central gets three counties from Lakeland; the rest of Lakeland, Aspen and western WestView were amalgamated, as were Mistahia and Peace; Northern Lights and Northwestern were also joined; Keeweenaw Lakes was divided between the two expanded northern authorities. Calgary absorbed part of Region 5 and all of Headwaters. Capital expanded to absorb Parkland County to the west and the MD of Sturgeon to the north. More information is available from David Allen at the Divisional office.
3. The mental health divestiture plans were not considered due to other pressures on the Health and Wellness Minister such as regionalization, a response to Romanow and a national First Ministers' conference. Decisions are apparently about one month behind schedule and we should begin to hear specifics by late January. The predictions of CMHA's Executive Director in point #5 of the November 25 edition are still anticipated.
4. The Romanow Report on health care was released November 28. Dennis Anderson represented National CMHA in a "lock-up" orientation prior to the release in Ottawa. The report had much more to say about mental health than

did Senator Kirby's report in October (although Kirby committed to a specific mental health report in the future). In brief, Romanow speaks to (1) the importance and urgency of addressing mental health issues; (2) improving the integration of mental health into general health; (3) new money for primary care and home care; (4) the inclusion of mental health in home care; (5) new ways of looking at primary care, including the involvement of physicians in teams; and (6) "pharmacare" in catastrophic events like severe and persistent mental illnesses. CMHA's contribution to the report was strongly acknowledged.

5. Three controversial and perhaps limiting aspects of the Romanow report relate to how the proposals can be funded; a proposal for a Federal "watchdog"; and tying dollars to federal priorities. Anne McLellan may have backed down on each of these proposals at the December meeting of Ministers, which could pose a future problem for mental health if the provinces take intended "community" service dollars and move them back to acute in-patient care.
6. In September of last year, First Ministers proposed a primary health care capacity fund to look at new ways of providing primary care (the public's first contact with the health system). The Federal Government recently announced a fund of \$800 million over four years with Alberta's share at \$54.7 million. Alberta Health and Wellness will receive proposals until January 17. One tentative proposal is being looked at by the Edmonton Police Service, Capital Health, CMHA and others that would provide early medical intervention and court diversion. Information on the fund is available at [www.health.gov.ab.ca/system/key/building\\_fund](http://www.health.gov.ab.ca/system/key/building_fund) . Sixteen million is available through competitive proposals.
7. On December 18, Alberta Health Minister Gary Mar released the results of his Committee on *Collaboration and Innovation*. The key recommendations are: to transfer programs like aids to daily living from Alberta Health and Wellness to the Health Authorities; that funding arrangements with RHAs be based on "performance contracts"; and that contracts with profit and not-for-profit organizations be expanded. The latter may present real growth opportunities for CMHA and its service contracts, but will be opposed by those who fear service privatization.
8. The Alberta Mental Health Board met on December 6 with a light agenda. Decisions/reports of some significance included (1) approval of the Child and Adolescent Services Association of Edmonton budget in the amount of \$2.9 million; (2) the AMHB accreditation process will be completed in January; (3) the Ponoka Hospital reconstruction is nearly complete, with an official opening with Premier Klein planned for February 28, 2003 (the Progressive

Conservative Spring Convention in Red Deer will follow); (4) a “quality and accountability” survey indicated staff are satisfied with the amount of information they receive on divestiture; (5) a housing strategy is being developed; and (6) the annual report for 2001 – 2002 was released (the financial report details a deficit of \$7.4 million, as compared to a surplus of \$4.8 million in 2000/2001).

9. The Department of Human Resources and Employment is concerned that some 500 cases are being added to the AISH caseload each month (some 300 leave). As of September 2002, 30,284 people were on the disability benefits with 31% having mental health problems. The Minister is concerned about “sustainability” and has consulted CMHA and others regarding possible solutions. A position is being developed. One of the Department's strategies to get people back in to the workplace is the new Canada/Alberta, Community Employment (ACE) program. Information is available from Charan Dhaliwal at (780) 438-8174. CMHA has also proposed the development of consumer-managed businesses similar to those run by the Ontario Coalition of Alternative Businesses. The Minister is now evaluating that proposal.
10. The Children's Minister, Iris Evans, today released her report on the Review of the Child Welfare Act. The recommendations will address transition problems to adulthood, including keeping youths in foster care after age 18 if they attend school. The youth transition problems have been identified by CMHA since 1996 and included in several submissions to government. Other proposals include a renamed Child and Youth Advocate who reports to the Minister and not the Legislature, and easier access to adoption records.
11. CMHA's suicide prevention programs have expanded to include research, and they have “re-imaged” themselves as the Centre for Suicide Prevention and moved to a new location at 1202 Centre Street SE, Suite 320, Calgary, AB T2G 5A5. The full range of informational and educational services continue to be provided. More information is available at: phone (403) 245-3900; fax (403) 245-0299; or by e-mail, to [csp@suicideinfo.ca](mailto:csp@suicideinfo.ca) .
12. The Alberta Liberal Caucus is developing a policy paper on health care to supplement their *Making Medicare Better – A Discussion Paper*. Unlike the original paper, the policies are expected to include strong recommendations on mental health.
13. The Government of Alberta has begun a consultation on the Public Trustee Act and any possible changes, such as under what conditions should they

administer a deceased person's estate. More information is available at [www.gov.ab.ca](http://www.gov.ab.ca) . Go to Initiatives and Events.

14. Don't forget to enrol early for the Alberta Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health (AAMIMH) conference planned for March 6 and 7 at Fantasyland Hotel. Program information is available on the web at [www.mentalhealthalliance.ab.ca](http://www.mentalhealthalliance.ab.ca) or by phoning the AAMIMH at (780) 482-4993.
15. CTV will be airing a documentary on laughter and mental illness at 5:00 p.m. on January 11, 2002. The program will feature Derek Wilken and Melanie Grace, the brains behind the CHEERS Project. They will also be featured at the AAMIMH conference above noted.
16. Due to extensive government closures over the holidays they have issued a couple of emergency contact numbers:

Child Abuse: 1-800-387-5437  
Income Support – Edmonton: (780) 427-3390  
Income Support – Calgary: (403) 297-2995.

**SEASON'S GREETINGS TO ALL!**



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

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](mailto:division@cmha.ab.ca)  
Web site: [www.cmha.ab.ca](http://www.cmha.ab.ca)