

eFACTS



— MAY 23, 2003

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 CMHA's National Annual Conference in Yellowknife planned for July 18 to 20th is approaching rapidly. For information, go the CMHA National web site at www.cmha.ca or contact a CMHA office near you.
2. The March 31st transfer of mental health services from the Alberta Mental Health Board to Regional Health Authorities across the province appeared to have been handled "seamlessly" in that consumers/clients/patients and their families hardly knew it was happening. As predicted, the Board retains no service delivery responsibility for institutions, clinics or community agencies except for those that are provincial and sponsor services within the Board's mandate of education and advocacy.
3. While "seamless" for consumers, the transfer accounted for some loss of administrative jobs, left union members fuming about arbitrary policies, raised questions about the retention of some services, i.e. crisis programs which were deemed prevention and promotion, and drew criticisms for the large size of the AMHB given its reduced mandate (\$33 million for fiscal year 2003/2004).
4. The Alberta Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health conference on "People and Partnerships" was so successful that plans have begun for a 2004 event. The 2003 conference culminated in the release of a policy paper entitled *A Blueprint for Mental Health Reform*, a paper intended to inform and guide action as the Regional Health Authorities begin building new plans of mental health service delivery. The Alliance also elected former Psychologists' Association of Alberta President George Lucki as Chair, replacing founding Chair Dennis Anderson.
5. The AMHB and AAMIMH are attempting to forge new and more positive relationships, and meetings have been held to formalize a new alliance in order to begin the process of redesigning Alberta's mental health system in partnership. AMHB CEO Ray Block will continue in his position, and he has assigned a new staff liaison to the AAMIMH (Sandra Harrison, Director, Advocacy and Inter-ministerial Initiatives). Other members of the new AMHB executive team include Laurie Beverly, Director for Programs (forensics, telehealth, suicide prevention, etc.); Ruby Brown, Director, Monitoring and Evaluation; and Dr. Pierre Beausejour, Medical Advisor responsible for federal/provincial initiatives.

6. The Alberta Legislature ended its Spring Session on May 15th. At the beginning of the session there was considerable attention given to the unchanged level of the AISH benefit and the \$20-a-month increase in SFI from both the opposition and government backbenchers. The particular concern was over the impact of energy costs on AISH and SFI recipients. The questions evaporated as the weather improved and the focus switched to education funding and electrical deregulation. There were a few initiatives affecting the mental health system. Of some significance were:
 - 6.1 Bill 32, The Income and Employment Supports Act, which will place new emphasis on employment programs for disabled people. CMHA was provided an advance briefing on the proposed Act. The new program is intended to be “phased in” beginning in January 2004.
 - 6.2 AISH recipients who no longer qualify for income support because of increases in their Canada Pension Plan Disability benefit will now be able to access health coverage through the Alberta Adult Health Benefit. This will only apply to people who left AISH since January 2002 because of a CPP-D increase.
 - 6.3 The only section of the Health Information Act that required consent for disclosure, the transfer of health information by electronic means, was removed through an amendment to the Act.
 - 6.4 The pilot Calgary Diversion Project was commended on all sides of the Legislature. While Solicitor General Helen Forsyth went on the record supporting a province-wide program, no new dollars were committed to expand diversion (except for a new pilot in Edmonton (see 8 below)).
7. The Minister of Human Resources and Employment, Clint Dunford, has now initiated several meetings with a few “leading” organizations to examine ways of “sustaining” the AISH program. The meetings have also led to an Assistant Deputy Ministerial Committee on which CMHA also sits, which will be examining all facets of income assistance. CMHA’s promotion of consumer-driven employment opportunities is being examined as part of this initiative.
8. The Alberta Primary Health Care Capacity-Building Fund has approved an Edmonton diversion project as one of its priorities. CMHA, the AMHB and the Edmonton City Police Service made the \$1.4 million submission in December of last year and approval was announced April 25th. The Government of Alberta did not budget for diversion initiatives in its 2003/2004 budget as hoped for and, following extensive media coverage of the matter, reported they supported the initiative through the Capacity-Building Fund. The government is now being encouraged to fund programs in Calgary, St. Paul and Lethbridge for 2004/2005.

9. The Schizophrenia Society of Alberta continues to promote Community Treatment Orders, and both CMHA Executive Vice President Aleck Trawick and Executive Director Ron LaJeunesse have participated in community conferences to debate the provisions. CMHA's position is that research has clearly demonstrated the Orders do not work unless combined with Assertive Community Treatment, and then it is unclear if the Orders are needed at all.
10. The CMHA National/Health Canada "citizens" project to develop recommendations for federal mental health policy is moving ahead successfully, with the Alberta CMHA-led Forums beginning in Edmonton on May 16th and then spreading across Albert, BC and the NWT. Western results will be confirmed at a daylong consolidation meeting in Calgary on June 26th.
11. Mental Health Week, celebrated the first week in May of each year highlighted a wide range of educational activities across Alberta. The public education tools included a television ad entitled *Naked*. Watch for it on local TV or obtain a copy through the Alberta Division CMHA.
12. CMHA's Red Deer Region has produced a youth education film with NHL star Jesse Wallin of Red Deer. For more information contact that local office.
13. New affordable housing for persons with mental illness has been a priority for CMHA in Alberta for two years in an attempt to capitalize on the Federal Government "Homelessness" initiative. The first project in Canada to be opened using Federal/Provincial/ Municipal and community dollars was opened by CMHA in Grande Prairie on April 25th. The 58-unit multi-million-dollar facility will provide permanent, transitional and emergency housing in the northern city.
14. Approved Home operators across Alberta generated considerable press indicating they would need to close down given the large increase in liability insurance costs. They demanded more government money. However, CMHA brokered arrangements with alternative insurance carriers and the matter appears to have been resolved.
15. The Calgary Region of CMHA and the Division's Centre for Suicide Prevention have moved to a new location in Calgary at 1202 Centre Street SE in Calgary. Phone numbers remain the same.
16. The CMHA Camrose Region is sponsoring its 5th Annual Fund Raising Golf Tournament on June 21. For more information phone 780-672-2570.
17. The Edmonton Region of CMHA will hold its AGM on Wednesday, June 18 at the Alex Taylor School, 9321 Jasper Avenue. Registration at 7:00 p.m., reception to follow. RSVP by June 13 at 414-6300.

18. CMHA Calgary Director Trish Cameron has announced her retirement effective early fall 2003. CMHA Edmonton Director Joanne Kidd has been awarded a Muttart Fellowship and will be leaving for a year beginning this August. Replacement searches have begun. Contact the Regional or Divisional office for more information. Both Directors are valued, experienced administrators and their absence will be felt.
19. The CMHA Executive and Strategic Planning Committees will meet in Calgary on May 30th. Preliminary plans for the next two-year service cycle are being developed in consultation with all Alberta Regional Boards, and any CMHA member who wishes to advise the provincial Board about priorities for the future should write, fax or e-mail the Alberta Division.
20. Several CMHA Directors, volunteers and staff were awarded Golden Jubilee medals by the Governor General for their contributions to Canadian life. The recipients included Mary Oordt of Lethbridge, Doug Baxter from Calgary, Bettie Friesen from Camrose and Ron LaJeunesse from Edmonton.
21. CMHA Executive Director Ron LaJeunesse was also awarded the Grant MacEwan literary Award for his book *Political Asylums*. The award is considered Alberta's most prestigious annual literary award and is also recognized as one of the top Canadian awards.
22. Plans for the 2005 National AGM are proceeding well. The Conference will, for the first time in the recent history of CMHA, feature a partnership with other organizations such as the Schizophrenia Society. Set the dates of September 22nd to 24th aside and watch the CMHA web site for detailed information.
23. CMHA Past-President Dennis Anderson and Executive Director Ron LaJeunesse were invited to the World Congress on Mental Health in Melbourne, Australia to present on pet therapy and world mental health policy respectively. The Biennial Congress is held throughout the world, with the 2005 Congress to be held in Cairo.
24. National CMHA General Director Ed Pennington, at the Toronto headquarters, has announced his retirement for the fall of this year. An active search is now underway to replace him, and members who wish to suggest a candidate should contact Jack Shand at cmha@associationconsultants.com or 1-877-929-HIRE (4473).

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