

## eFACTS 04

Thank you for the feedback on our "new-look" eFACTS. It was received quite enthusiastically and we appreciate all who took the time to write back and tell us so. Now for our "late" April edition!

### Learning

1. **Make a goal to learn more about the value of making connections during Mental Health Week.** *Making Connections* is the theme for the Week in 2004, which runs from May 3 – 9. Mental Health Week is a national awareness campaign that provides Canadians with many opportunities to find out more about the importance of mental health, and how to achieve it in our daily lives.

A highlight of Mental Health Week 2004 is the opening of an art exhibition, *Mindscales*, at the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa on May 5, where 50 works by Canadian artists living with mental illness will be on display until May 30.

2. **We are asked a lot.** The "Health Link": information lines are apparently a valuable resource when people are looking for information on mental health issues and services. The mental health component of the service is relatively new so we are going to repeat the numbers here. For help 24 hours a day, seven days a week, call Edmonton 408-LINK (5465); Calgary 943-LINK (5465); or province-wide, toll-free at 1-866-408-5465.

### Mental Health Reform

1. **"The" report should be out in early May.** The Alberta Mental Health Board's plan for a contemporary mental health system was discussed by the Minister of Health and Wellness and senior officials of the Alberta Mental Health Board last week, and a further meeting of government officials is planned for May 3 to discuss "processing the plan" and "communications." It is expected the report will be released shortly thereafter.
2. **Ensuring the "Plan" is used.** In anticipation of the plan's release, the Alberta Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health is developing a political action campaign in order to ensure government members are fully informed. The campaign will include personal contact with MLAs, with a focus on seven priorities, each with a briefing paper: (1) An Executive Summary; (2) The Importance of Retaining a Provincial Authority; (3) Housing; (4) Criminal Justice Diversion; (5) Assertive Community Treatment; (6) AISH; and (7) Primary Care. The initiative will replace CMHA plans to follow up on late December contacts with provincial MLAs.
3. **Government's overall 20-year "Strategic Plan."** Entitled *Today's Opportunities, Tomorrow's Promise*, and released with the Provincial Budget, the plan is intended to serve as a guide for (Conservative) government policy and direction for the next 20 years. Interestingly, one of the four key areas ("pillars") around which the plan is built, is "Unleashing Innovation." It is to be hoped that that theme will be carried forward through the implementation of the new Provincial Mental Health Plan, which, in its latest draft, speaks of innovation.

4. **A priority means allocating resources to it.** The province's eleventh consecutive balanced budget, released March 24, is promoted as providing the foundation for Alberta's future, with focuses on: learning; health; the Capital Plan; strong, safe communities; and a 20-year strategic plan. Health and Wellness spending will increase almost 19 per cent over the next three years. In 2004 - 2005, program spending will reach \$8 billion, an increase of 8.4 per cent, or \$618 million. Funding specifically dedicated to mental health is to increase by \$19.5 million to \$263.8 million for 2004 - 2005. It is anticipated that much of the general health increase will be used by RHAs to reduce deficits, and it is hoped that an additional allocation will be announced when the Mental Health Plan is released.
5. **Keeping the issues front and centre.** The Alberta Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health's second annual conference, *From Passion to Action*, was held in Edmonton March 11 - 12. Although total registrations were down slightly from last year - a major concern was lack of participants from the RHAs - conference evaluations were uniformly very positive, providing participants with a look at international "best practices" and government's plans for moving ahead in Alberta.
6. **"Alberta Works" may indeed work.** A new initiative, *Alberta Works*, was announced March 29 by Human Resources and Employment Minister Clint Dunford. The initiative will harmonize the benefits provided through three programs - Supports for Independence (SFI), Skills Development Program (SDP), living allowances and Widows' Pension. Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) will continue as a separate program, and is to be reviewed in the fall of 2004.
7. **Your health records tell much.** Maintaining the confidentiality of mental health records has been a priority of CMHA for several years. Working in partnership with nurses, doctors and police officials, the Association has worked to influence law and regulations in order to ensure the right balance between personal privacy and public safety. On April 22 the government announced an all-party "Special Select Committee" of the Legislature to review the Act. CMHA will be participating in that process, and member concerns should be sent to the Alberta Division.
8. **Magazine awarded.** Alberta newsmagazine *Alberta Views* made history by being the first Alberta (and probably Canadian) magazine to dedicate most of an entire issue to mental health matters, in December of 2003. The AAMIMH recognized that fact at their March conference, by awarding the magazine the *Dennis Anderson Media Award*. Copies of the magazine's December issue, entitled *Back to the Future*, were provided to all conference participants. For more information, go to [www.albertaviews.ab.ca](http://www.albertaviews.ab.ca) .
9. **Political Asylums online.** The highly-acclaimed book *Political Asylums*, winner of the 2003 Grant MacEwan Literary Award, is now sold out, with no plans for a reprint. It is, however, available online at no cost. Go to the CMHA Alberta web site at [www.cmha.ab.ca](http://www.cmha.ab.ca) or to [www.muttart.org](http://www.muttart.org) .
10. **Empowerplus should be available.** The controversial nutritional supplement should be available to Canadian users through American suppliers IF ordered for personal use. A 2003 warning by Health Canada led to border confiscations and a range of activity designed to dissuade Canadian consumers from using the product for mood disorders and other mental illnesses. In spite of its controversial nature, there seems to be evidence that the product is valuable for some people who suffer bipolar depression and other mood disorders. Working with Federal officials, CMHA has tried to ensure that orders for personal use are not blocked by Customs officials, and that new clinical trials to prove or disprove the efficacy of the nutrients are

researched. Interested consumers should be sure to evaluate the product carefully, including a visit to Health Canada at [www.hc-sc.gc.ca](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca) – along with a frank discussion with your family doctor.

## Administrative “Stuff”

1. **The “Board Report.”** A detailed report of items addressed at the Divisional CMHA Board meeting of March 12 is available upon request. The next meeting of the Provincial Board of Directors, while tentatively scheduled to be held in Calgary on June 13, may be postponed. More information will be provided shortly.
2. **Award.** CMHA Alberta South East Regional President Kathy Farrell has been honoured with the City of Medicine Hat Humanitarian Award for her professional and volunteer work with numerous organizations. She will be receiving her award on Thursday, May 6, coincidentally during Mental Health Week.
3. **Retired – nope.** CMHA Divisional Executive Director Ron LaJeunesse is working part-time under contract to CMHA, and there has been some external confusion about his status. He has retained responsibilities as the Executive Director of the Association in Alberta, and is doing so with the support of two Associate Executive Directors, David Allen and Peter Portlock. The Board has approved a succession plan, and interested candidates will be sought in the months ahead.
4. **Recognize your colleagues.** Each year our members say, “I wish I had nominated . . . ” after the fact. Nominations for National CMHA awards are being sought until May 31 You can send nominations to CMHA National Office, 8 King Street East, Suite 810, Toronto, ON M5C 1B5.
5. **Other changes.** Former Mental Health Branch Executive Director Denis Ostercamp will retire after almost 40 years of government service. CMHA provided him with a gift and special recognition at an April retirement event. The AMHB’s Executive Director, Planning, Advocacy and Liaison, Sandra Harrison, has announced her retirement. Sandra has been a strong proponent of community care, and her leadership will be missed.

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