

eFACTS 04

Mental Health Reform

1. **What happened to the Minister's priority?** The Premier's June 30 announcement regarding health care reform was surprisingly absent of references to the government's plans for mental health services. Advocates had expected that the promised service improvements and "transition fund" would form a portion of the Premier's announcement. The Alberta Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health (AAMIMH) issued a new release expressing disappointment; and they, along with the CMHA, are now attempting to determine if, when and how government plans will be announced.
2. **But work proceeds!** Alberta Health and Wellness has taken the lead on an interdepartmental committee to examine ways to expand supportive housing options across the province. The task group has developed an inventory of current services and will be looking at concrete ways to expand those resources. CMHA's Peter Portlock sits on the task group and more information is available from the Alberta Division CMHA.
3. **Are your health records secure?** CMHA is actively monitoring the government's review of the Health Information Act, and a formal submission is being developed to try and address some of the deficiencies identified prior to the Act becoming law three years ago. The review is being done by a committee of the Legislature and the process could be interrupted if an election is called.
4. **To the polls on September 27?** Government rumblings about a fall election may well delay implementation of mental health reform activities further, and it is highly unlikely that the current Health and Wellness Minister (who at least professes to see mental health reform as a priority) will remain in the Health portfolio. In anticipation of an election (the most persistent rumour being September 27) and change of Minister, the CMHA is in the process of designing a non-partisan election strategy to inform candidates regarding the urgency of moving ahead with the recently developed plan.
5. **The Federal Election.** Although a national strategy was developed, only modest effort went into educating candidates during the Federal Election campaign. The priority for action was a recommendation for a "Pan-Canadian" strategy on mental health and illness. The agenda will now be advanced in Ottawa as the National CMHA works on improving its capacity to influence government policy – a service priority only recently endorsed by the National Board of Directors.
6. **National consultations.** CMHA Ontario Division hosted a national consultation on home care and mental health in Toronto in early June, on behalf of CMHA's national office. The *Home Care Sector and Mental Health Project* is one of six Health Canada "VOICE in Health Policy" initiatives intended to generate a range of policy options to advise the federal government, in this instance on the interface between home care

and mental health. Peter Portlock participated on behalf of AAMIMH and CMHA. Issues and options were identified, and some consensus was achieved. A summary of discussions and recommendations is being prepared, for further circulation. Later in the same week Peter participated in a Health Canada stakeholder consultation on the new "Summary Basis of Decision" process, which is intended to increase provide greater public transparency on Health Canada protocols for approving new drugs and therapeutic devices.

7. **Where is Kirby?** The so-called "Kirby commission," a senate committee examining mental health services, will tour the country this fall. The National Association and Alberta Division have already been invited to present to the committee, and in June presented recommendations on national policies on mental health and illness and on suicide prevention. More information will be made available as their itinerary becomes known.
8. **Even New Brunswick!** The province which has been the undisputed leader in developing community support services appears to be sliding backwards. The new Conservative government in that province has hammered mental health budgets and the system appears to be having some difficulty maintaining itself. Advocates are trying to influence the situation; however, little progress appears to be being made.

Improved Knowledge

1. **A national first!** More than 500 delegates attended the July 7 to 11 CMHA and Schizophrenia Society National Conference held in Saint John, New Brunswick. This is the first time the two national organizations have held a joint meeting. Keynote presenters included *Schizophrenia Digest* publisher Bill McPhee, former national Finance Minister and mental health advocate Michael Wilson, CMHA Alberta Executive Director Ron LaJeunesse and New Brunswick psychiatrist Dr. John Bradford. The keynote presenters all enjoyed standing ovations and their motivational presentations were supplemented by more than 35 workshops on topics as varied as "Is Religion Beneficial or Harmful to Mental Health?" and "Suicide, Myths and Misconceptions." The 2005 Annual meeting and conference will be held in Edmonton September 21 to 24, with the theme, *Make Mental Health Matter*. The conference will celebrate Alberta's 100th Anniversary along with the 50th Anniversary of CMHA in the province. The 2006 meeting will be in Quebec City, with 2007 in Ottawa.
2. **Framework – third edition.** The National *Framework for Support* third edition is out. The 24-page booklet provides a succinct description of the CMHA community support philosophy, integrating it conceptually with the "knowledge resource base," the "personal resource base" and new thinking around "recovery." Copies are available from CMHA National at www.cmha.ca or by phoning (416) 484-7750.
3. **Suicide resource comparisons.** The Centre for Suicide Prevention has produced *A Summary Of National, State And Provincial Strategies For The Prevention Of Suicide*. The easy-to-read summary provides a good description of a comprehensive suicide service and tables comparing initiatives across Canada and in 11 developed countries. The Centre has also produced an excellent pamphlet on the Centre and its resources. Go to www.suicideinfo.ca for more information.
4. **Mental illness awareness.** Since its launch in 1992, Mental Illness Awareness Week (MIAW) has been coordinated by the Canadian Psychiatric Association (CPA), with help from many partners. This responsibility has transitioned to the Canadian Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health (CAMIMH) and promotional materials are already available.

The theme of this year's campaign is *Face Mental Illness* and it will run from October 4 to 10. The core elements of the 2004 campaign will include: a grassroots public education initiative; a nationally-distributed poster and bookmark series; and the 2nd Annual Champions of Mental Health Awards luncheon on October 5 in Ottawa. The luncheon is a component of a new education initiative to be undertaken with federal Members of Parliament, both in their home ridings and on Parliament Hill.

For more information visit the MIAW web site at www.miaw.ca .

5. **Chatelaine support.** *Chatelaine Magazine* has teamed up with CMHA to provide education services and to sell "Mental Health Matters" shirts in order to generate funds for new programming. Order your shirt by visiting the web site at www.chatelaine.com/tshirt .
6. **211 is coming.** The international approach to providing "211" telephone service for all non-emergency community service is finally coming to Edmonton and Calgary. The 24-hour service will integrate a range of community information numbers and is being tested over the summer months. Full implementation is planned for October of 2004.

Leadership

1. **Albertans on the National Board.** The July 11 Annual General Meeting of CMHA National saw the election of another Albertan to the 24-member Board. Jodi Cohen of Calgary will join Bob Campbell of Lethbridge, Bill Gaudette of Calgary and Dennis Anderson of Edmonton. Mr. Campbell was also elected National Vice-President of the Association, a step that could result in his election to the Presidency when Karen McGrath of Newfoundland and Labrador completes her term, possibly at the 2005 Edmonton conference and AGM.
2. **Evidence he is serious about retirement.** The CMHA in Alberta is now actively recruiting to replace Executive Director Ron LaJeunesse, who will be retiring in December. The deadline for applications is July 31, 2004. For more information visit the CMHA web site at www.cmha.ab.ca .
3. **Local leadership changes.** CMHA Edmonton's interim Executive Director David Maher will be leaving the Association in August to allow for the return of Joanne Kidd, who will have completed her Muttart Fellowship. In Fort McMurray, Regional Executive Director Timmi Shorr announced plans for maternity leave; and in Grande Prairie, Regional Executive Director Helma Fletcher is examining a change in responsibilities that will allow her to focus on her passion for developing housing services.

Recognition

1. **Albertans honoured.** CMHA Alberta Division Honourary Solicitor Mary Marshall was awarded the A.H. Trawick, Q.C. National award for "interest, compassion and understanding" in her legal work, and the Alberta Division's Calgary-based Centre for Suicide Prevention received the Association's first-ever "Ed Pennington Innovation Award." Some 19 awards were presented by the National CMHA and Schizophrenia Society at their joint conference in Saint John, New Brunswick.
2. **More Albertans honoured.** Capital Health Authority Senior Operating Officer Eleanor Grant and CMHA Provincial Executive Director Ron LaJeunesse were recognized for their lifelong work in promoting improved mental health services at a

gala awards event sponsored by CMHA's Edmonton Region. Each leader is the first recipient of an award created and named in their honour.

3. **Retirement event later.** The retirement event for outgoing Executive Director Ron LaJeunesse will be delayed until September of 2005 in order to allow for the participation of his colleagues from across Canada. The event is now planned to be held in conjunction with the National Conference, from September 21 to 24 in Edmonton.

Administrative "stuff"

1. **Board dates may change.** The next meeting of the Board of the Alberta Division of CMHA was planned for October 16 in Edmonton, to be held in conjunction with the Annual General Membership meeting and a retirement party. Given plans to move the "retirement event" to 2005, consideration is being given to pushing ahead this year's meetings one week in order to integrate the sessions into the Canadian Association of Suicide Prevention (CASP) conference planned for October 20 to 23 in Edmonton. The staff in-service training day would also have to be adjusted and Board members and staff are being consulted to see if the plan is feasible.
2. **Board changes.** Calgary Region Board member and delegate to the Provincial Board Mark Weatherly will be leaving the Association's leadership effective immediately. Mark's quiet, thoughtful and sensitive interventions will be missed. He will be replaced on the CMHA Provincial Board by Susan Rich.

Edmonton Region Board member and Provincial Board delegate Brad Hornseth has decided to step down due to conflicting responsibilities, and he will be replaced by newly-elected President Abigail Parrish-Craig.

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