

August 31, 2007

(Addressed to individual Alberta MLAs)

The Alberta Division of the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA Alberta) is pleased to share with you some important perspectives relating to improving mental health services in our province.

CMHA Alberta recently agreed (with some suggested amendments – see attached) to endorse the provincial government's proposed Bill 31 – which included the introduction of community treatment orders (CTOs). While agreeing to endorse the Bill, we recognize that CTOs can potentially benefit only a very small number of people.

We are confident that with some changes this legislation could be of some service. However, our fear is that it will be seen as a panacea for shortcomings in mental health services and that attention will be diverted away from the greater need for more service for those living with mental illness in communities across Alberta.

As a government news releases acknowledges, "in a well-functioning mental health system, CTOs should rarely be necessary." Furthermore, they will not be effective, even in dealing with the very small number of people to whom they may apply, unless improvements are made to the present community support systems.

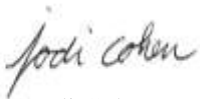
Within Bill 31, it is mandated that for a CTO to be issued, "the treatment or care the person requires exists in the community, is available to the person and will be provided to the person." This would not be the situation now in many cases for those meeting the other criteria for CTOs, let alone for the many thousands of other Albertans living with mental illness who are currently suffering from a lack of available services.

It is our hope that through the examination of Bill 31 there will be a greater understanding of mental health and mental illness and that more funding will be directed to appropriate supports and services.

We understand that throughout your term, there may be many occasions on which you will have opportunity to vote or provide input on issues relating to or impacting the quality of life for Albertans living with mental illness. We ask that you review the attached summary of the issues. If you would like more information, CMHA would be glad to respond to your enquiries, and we look forward to hearing from you. A CMHA backgrounder, with a list of locations, is attached for your convenience.

Thank you for your service and for your role in supporting the health needs of Albertans.

Yours truly,



Jodi Cohen
President and Chair
Alberta Division Board of Directors



Tom Shand
Executive Director
Alberta Division

JRC/jrd

Attachments:

- Mental Health Needs – Direct Services
- Associated Needs and Related Concerns
- CMHA – Alberta Division's Bill 31 Statement
- CMHA in Alberta – A Backgrounder

- Mental Illness Information Sheet
- Annual Report (CMHA – Alberta Division)