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## Catch a Break helps Albertans catch osteoporosis early

EDMONTON – More Albertans will get screened and treated for osteoporosis with the launch of Catch a Break, a new Alberta Health Services (AHS) program that aims to reduce the number of hip fractures in the province.

Through the program, health professionals contact Albertans who may have sustained a bone break as a result of osteoporosis, a disease that causes bones to be thin and brittle. These breaks, called fragility fractures, are often the first warning sign for osteoporosis.

If osteoporosis is suspected, these individuals are mailed information about the disease, including the risk factors and how to use calcium, vitamin D and exercise to strengthen bones. Notification and information about treatments for osteoporosis are also sent to their family doctors.

More than 1,500 Albertans have been contacted since the program launched in AHS' Edmonton Zone in June, and nearly 900 of those individuals have been identified high risk for osteoporosis. The program will be introduced in the Calgary Zone this fall, and rolled out provincewide by early next year.

“Catch a Break is about making sure a patient’s first fragility fracture is their last,” says Mel Slomp, Executive Director of AHS' Bone and Joint Health Strategic Clinical Network, which developed the program in conjunction with the Alberta Bone and Joint Health Institute.

“By identifying that first break and treating osteoporosis early, we will significantly reduce the chance of a second, more serious fragility fracture, like a hip fracture.”

Every year, more than 2,400 Albertans – most of them elderly – fracture their hip. Almost all have osteoporosis and most are unaware they have it. As many as one in five people diagnosed with a fragility fracture will have another fracture within 12 months.

In Canada, fractures from osteoporosis are more common than heart attack, stroke and breast cancer combined. Statistics from Osteoporosis Canada show more than 80 per cent of all fractures in people 50 and older are caused by fragile bones, yet fewer than 20 per cent of fracture patients undergo diagnosis or adequate treatment for osteoporosis.

Catch a Break aims to close this gap.

“A key part of the program is the connection to family doctors,” says Slomp. “They receive an information package as well as details about the program, information about osteoporosis and diagnosis and treatment guidelines to prevent the disease from progressing.”

Catch a Break is operated by AHS staff through Health Link Alberta, Alberta’s 24-hour health information and advice line, who use data from emergency departments and cast clinics across the province to identify Albertans who may have suffered a fragility fracture.

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“When we contact the patients, we ask for information about how the fracture occurred,” says Lara Osterreicher, Director of Operations for Health Link Alberta. “If we suspect a fragility fracture, we invite the patient to join the Catch a Break program.”

Edward Kohel was recently invited to join the Catch a Break program after sustaining a cracked wrist caused by a slip on the ice last winter.

“When it comes down to patient care, this program is great,” says the 61-year-old St. Albert resident. “I was really impressed the followup was made. So much thought and care went into it.”

He says he never would have thought about his bones being weak but is now booking an appointment with his doctor to get screened for osteoporosis.

For more information on Catch a Break and osteoporosis, visit:

<https://myhealth.alberta.ca/alberta/Pages/Catch-a-break.aspx>

The Bone and Joint Health Strategic Clinical Network is one of 10 SCNs operating within AHS. SCNs bring together people who are passionate and knowledgeable about specific areas of health, challenging them to find new and innovative ways of delivering care that will provide better quality, better outcomes and better value for every Albertan.

Alberta Health Services is the provincial health authority responsible for planning and delivering health supports and services for more than four million adults and children living in Alberta. Its mission is to provide a patient-focused, quality health system that is accessible and sustainable for all Albertans.

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