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AHS takes action on OAG mental health report

EDMONTON – Alberta Health Services (AHS) continues to take action that will address recommendations from the Office of the Auditor General (OAG) to improve care and supports for those suffering from addiction and mental illness.

The OAG report, released today (www.oag.ab.ca/node/494), makes three new recommendations to AHS, each with several sub-recommendations. They replace 11 previous OAG recommendations that AHS has been addressing.

“The issues raised in this report are significant and important,” says Vickie Kaminiski, President and CEO, AHS. “We understand the importance of providing Albertans affected by mental illness and addictions with the care and services they require, when they need it.

“I have accepted the Auditor General’s recommendations and have committed to continuing to improve the care we provide to clients, while working with other organizations to ensure clients receive the supports they need.

“AHS is pleased the Premier of Alberta has launched a full-scale review of Alberta’s addiction and mental health system, and has committed to doing what it can to support that review.”

AHS’ response to the recommendations is outlined in detail in the attached *Backgrounder*.

The OAG report notes that since 2008, AHS has significantly improved how mental health and addiction services are organized and delivered in Alberta. Specific achievements to date include:

- The integration of addiction and mental health services to better serve the needs of Albertans. Given that many with mental illness also have substance use problems, integrated treatment is most effective. Addiction and mental health staff are trained in providing integrated care, and services have been designed to treat addiction and mental health problems concurrently.
- Embedding addiction and mental health professionals in key areas of AHS to ensure access to services, and transition between services. All zones have addiction and mental health staff working with, or available to support, emergency departments and other key areas of health care.
- Implementing Community Treatment Orders (CTOs) for patients with severe and persistent mental illness to ensure they receive the care they need in the community. As of March 31, 2015, 1,384 CTOs have been issued.
- The development of provincial Health Link 811 and Mental Health Help Line services for 24/7 access to mental health help and resources.
- Working with other government ministries and stakeholders to identify housing needs and supports for patients.

“Much of this work is due to hard work and dedication of the 9,000 addiction and mental health staff who provide care to more than 150,000 Albertans every year. I want to acknowledge them and the very important work they do,” says Kaminski.

“While the Auditor General recognized that important improvements have been made, we know there is still work to do and we have committed to getting that work done.”

Planned actions include:

- Working with physicians and other non-AHS service providers to enhance integrated care provided to hospital and community mental health patients.
- Improving access to mental health resources at hospital emergency departments.
- Continuing to improve care planning and case management practices consistent with Accreditation Canada standards and evidence-based standards of care.
- Continuing to develop, and implement, best practices under the leadership of the Addiction and Mental Health Strategic Clinical Network.
- Improving access for authorized health care workers to clinical information of addiction and mental health patients, no matter what AHS site they are at.

The report also highlights the need to improve community housing supports provided to individuals affected by mental illness and addictions. AHS will continue its work and support of the work of the cross-ministry housing planning team established under the mandate of the Minister of Seniors by completing an assessment of the gaps between supply and demand for community housing support services for its patients.

AHS will also develop a process to assess the housing support needs of patients and coordinate their placement into spaces funded by AHS.

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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