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## Dementia advice now available through Health Link

CENTRAL ZONE – Alberta Health Services (AHS) is introducing specialized dementia advice available through Health Link to help support individuals and caregivers living with dementia, including people with Alzheimer’s disease.

The new dementia advice service was introduced today for residents who call Health Link from the Central, South and North zones of AHS, and is expected to expand provincewide next spring.

By dialing 811 – any time, any day – callers will reach Health Link staff who can assess their needs and provide immediate advice for their health concerns. When needed, callers can also be referred to a specialized dementia nurse for additional support.

The dementia nurse, who has extensive training and experience in seniors’ health, will be able to do a more in-depth assessment to gain an understanding of each individual situation. The dementia nurse will provide support and advice to patients and caregivers, and can connect callers to services available in their community.

“Strengthening supports for Albertans with dementia through the new 811 service is a tremendous step forward in making sure people with dementia, their families, and their caregivers have much-needed resources and support available to them,” says Sarah Hoffman, Minister of Health. “Our government is pleased and proud to provide funding for this new service, which means better care is just a phone call away for Albertans whose lives are touched by dementia.”

The addition of dementia advice to Health Link has been made possible through a \$1.1-million grant from the Government of Alberta.

“Providing dementia advice is an important health service both now and looking into the future,” says Lara Osterreicher, AHS Director of Operations for Health Link.

Currently, about 40,000 Albertans are living with dementia, a syndrome that affects memory, thinking, orientation, judgment and ability to carry out daily activities.

The number of dementia cases is expected to more than double in Alberta as the baby boom generation moves into older age. By 2038, it is estimated that about one in 10 Albertans over the age of 65, and nearly half over age 90, will be living with dementia.

“We’re starting the service in the rural zones because that is where the greatest need is,” says Osterreicher. “Typically, rural and remote areas don’t have access to the same level of services as our urban centres. Over the next six months, we will evaluate the service and monitor call volumes to make sure it’s meeting the needs of Albertans. We then plan to expand the implementation of the service to both Calgary and Edmonton.”

Health Link has worked with AHS’ Seniors Health Strategic Clinical Network (SCN) to develop and implement this new service.

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“Dementia usually means a slow decline in mental capacity with associated changes in judgment and sometimes in behavior,” says Dr. Duncan Robertson, Senior Medical Director with the Seniors SCN. “This has a huge impact on the quality of life and well-being of people who live with dementia, as well as their caregivers.”

By better supporting individuals and caregivers, the new dementia advice service also aims to reduce the number of avoidable emergency department visits for dementia-related concerns.

Tracey Black, AHS Area Director of Mountain View and Clearwater Counties, says Health Link is filling a gap by providing support services to caregivers and people with dementia within central Alberta.

“Until now, many caregivers and people with dementia struggle to find support or resources to aid in their journey,” says Black, Central Zone’s representative on the working group that helped develop this new service.

“With Health Link providing specialized registered nurses to this new service, people will be better able to cope and understand what they are dealing with. Living with dementia can be very difficult; however, with this service, opportunities will be available to possibly stay at home and with their loved ones longer.”

For more information visit: <http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/11773.asp>.

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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