



# Accelerating community-based mental health care

## A message for patients, families and staff

Mental Health leaders and extensive research have been telling us for many years that best practice in mental health care lies in community-based models. Alberta has been moving in that direction and Alberta Health Services is now accelerating that work.

We are now actively engaging clinicians, staff and stakeholders to determine where mental health patients across Alberta can best be supported and how we can more quickly provide that support. Initially, the focus of this work will be concentrated in the Edmonton area following a decision by AHS not to proceed with the redevelopment of the Alberta Hospital Edmonton (AHE) site.

Alberta Health Services is working hard to ensure we are providing the right care in the right place - to strike a balance between community spaces and acute care. Patients with mental illness will be transitioned from Alberta Hospital Edmonton to capacity in the community or acute care hospitals depending on need.

Alberta Hospital Edmonton has a long and rich history in this province. Since it opened in 1923, it has become a national and international leader in the field of research and is well recognized for several treatment programs. Each year, its staff provides care and support to more than 1,500 Albertans.

But as you know, care for the mentally ill has evolved significantly since the early 1900s when mental hospitals were the major site of treatment and care for the mentally ill. Therapeutic advances in the form of medications and treatment philosophies have allowed us to do a better job of providing care and support in the community. Around the world, there has been an even greater focus on community-based treatment programs.

The implementation of this plan will take place over several months and parts of AHE will remain open. The forensic unit will not be closed and newer AHE facilities will continue to be used. Long-term plans for outdated facilities no longer appropriate for patient care have not been determined.

During the transition, AHS will strengthen both local and provincial community mental health treatment spaces to ensure the necessary resources are available to all patients, regardless of where they live.

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## Questions and Answers

### Are you going to close Alberta Hospital Edmonton?

No. We will gradually close some of the older buildings at Alberta Hospital Edmonton (AHE). Newer AHE facilities will continue to be used to provide mental health care as long as they are needed to provide the appropriate patient care. The forensic unit will not be closed. Longer term plans for the AHE site have yet to be determined. Alberta Health Services (AHS) is not moving forward with earlier redevelopment proposals for AHE because it does not have the infrastructure to provide the most appropriate community-based support for many mental health patients.

### What will happen to all the patients? Alberta Hospital Edmonton is a 410-bed facility and it's at capacity.

For some patients, AHE will continue to be the most appropriate place for care, including patients in the forensic mental health unit. AHS will admit acute mental health patients from AHE to expanded capacity in community and urban hospitals over time, depending on patient needs.

Mental Health is another area where providing the right service, in the right place and at the right time can be improved.

*Vision 2020,  
Alberta Health & Wellness, 2008*

AHS is actively engaging clinicians, staff and stakeholders to determine where mental health patients, both in Edmonton and across the province, can best be supported: in their communities, at community and urban

hospitals, or continuing at AHE.

In conjunction with the redevelopment decision, AHS will expand capacity in continuing care, designated assisted living and personal care homes dedicated to mental health clients. AHS will also consider additional funding to the community-based organizations that provide this support.

### Not all the patients at Alberta Hospital Edmonton can safely be transitioned to the community. Where will they go?

AHS recognizes the critical stabilization role of inpatient mental health beds; AHE will continue to offer safe, high-quality inpatient care to all of our clients as we transition appropriate patients to appropriate community-based mental health treatment programs and other inpatient options.

In some cases, the best care can be provided at AHE and in other cases at community and urban hospitals: the decision will be made based on the needs of patients.

AHS will carefully assess AHE patients to determine appropriate care options. No one will be referred to community-based options if it's unsafe to the individual or the community.

The forensic mental health unit at AHE will remain open. If individuals are assessed by qualified psychiatrists and other health-care professionals to be a risk to self or others, they will not be an appropriate candidate for a community-based treatment program. The safety of the patient and public will be a major consideration in any placement decisions or recommendations.

Accelerating implementation of international best practice in mental health is a great opportunity for AHS to work with communities to develop a greater understanding so we can all work together to combat the

stigma often associated with mental health and mental illness.

Most individuals find ways to live with their illnesses but how they are treated by others often proves to be more of a challenge than the illness itself. Stigma and discrimination are key barriers that stop people from seeking help.

### Is this a cost-cutting measure?

AHS is facing a significant budget shortfall which must be addressed. However, it will provide funding as necessary to support community-based models of mental health care. Much of this funding would otherwise have been spent on redeveloping AHE, which would not have led to long-term community-based support.

We know we have high-quality outpatient treatment for many of our clients and we recognize there is work to do to enhance those services in order to continue to implement a community-based model of care within Addiction and Mental Health. This will certainly involve some investment.

Our current fiscal environment demands we look at every opportunity to create savings in the system. Any cost savings at AHE and cost avoidance in terms of capital costs will be considered as part of our overall savings targets as appropriate.

### What kind of community-based treatment options would be appropriate for Alberta Hospital Edmonton patients?

There are a range of community options which, depending on the care and support needs of the individuals, would be appropriate. These may include Personal Care Homes, lodges, Designated Assisted Living facilities, long-term care facilities or back into their own homes with appropriate supports from health and community. AHS will be assessing each client individually to identify the right place and the right care. The move toward more community-based options is part of an evolution of care for the mentally ill.

We are moving from a largely institution-based system to a community-based system that emphasizes an integrated continuum of care from many service deliverers.

*Report of the Auditor General  
of Alberta, April 2008*

### What about Centennial Centre in Ponoka? Are you planning any changes there?

The same infrastructure challenges do not exist at Centennial Centre in Ponoka. We do not have any plans to make significant changes there at this time; however, the services provided at that site will be reviewed and considered as an important component of a comprehensive package of services across Alberta within Addiction and Mental Health. Our focus on community-based care may provide new opportunities for those individuals being cared for at Centennial Centre and we will be looking at that, too.

### What will happen to physicians, psychiatric registered nurses and other professional health-care and support staff at AHE?

We will continue to have a need for these professions, the core that are necessary to provide good quality care will be required to take us into the future.

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