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AHS accelerates move to community-based mental health care

EDMONTON – Alberta Health Services (AHS) is continuing the evolution of community-based mental health treatment in the province, and is accelerating its move away from a largely institution-based system.

“We are 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,” says Dr. PJ White, Clinical Director, Addiction and Mental Health, Alberta Health Services. “Our primary focus remains providing the most appropriate care to our patients as they require it.”

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.

“The current Alberta Hospital Edmonton site does not have the infrastructure to provide the most appropriate support for many mental health patients,” says Dr. White. “We’ve decided to announce the redevelopment decision now to begin the transition and engagement process as transparently as possible.”

AHS will continue to strike a balance between community mental health treatment spaces and in-patient hospital beds across the province. Over time, AHS will admit acute mental health patients from AHE to expanded capacity in community and urban hospitals, depending on patient need.

Since it opened in 1923, AHE 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. Therapeutic advances in the form of medications and treatment philosophies have allowed AHE to do a better job of providing care and support in the community, and have historically been the origin of many of the current community mental health programs.

“The implementation of this plan will take place over several months and parts of AHE will remain open long term,” says Dr. White. “The forensic unit in the Helen Hunley Pavilion 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 Long term plans for outdated facilities no longer appropriate for patient care have not been determined.”

Alberta Health Services is the provincial health authority responsible for planning and delivering health supports and services for more than 3.5 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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For media inquiries, contact:

Don Stewart
Alberta Health Services
Media Relations
Phone: 403-943-1210