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## Community Living expansion adds almost 800 new spaces; includes 150 Mental Health beds, Emergency back-up plan

Alberta Health Services has launched a three-year, three-step coordinated plan to add almost 800 community living options, improve access to mental health care, address pressure on Emergency Departments and make better use of hospital beds for acutely ill patients.

The three-step plan will:

- One: Increase community living options, including home care, supportive living and long-term care, to ensure patients across the system are getting the right care in the right place. The plan accelerates growth this year in new community living options. In total there will be about 775 new spaces. (See Backgrounder: Community Living Expansion).
- Two: Allow for the transfer of hundreds of patients currently waiting in hospital beds for placement into more appropriate care settings as new community living options come on stream.
- Three: Adjust staffing of hospital beds not being used to support patients with acute care needs; using these resources to increase community living options, facilities and other urgent needs, including the funding of maternity nursing positions.
- The plan will release about 60 hospital beds this year to relieve Emergency Department pressures. The remainder will continue to be staffed until new community capacity comes on stream, at which point those beds will not be staffed unless needed to meet immediate or future use.

Hospital beds currently not being used for acute care will be held as surge capacity, including for H1N1. The need will be continuously monitored over this winter period.

Alberta Health Services is not contemplating layoffs at this stage as it assesses the continuing impact of its vacancy management program and its recently announced voluntary retirement program (See Backgrounder: Acute Care and Emergency Department Capacity).

### **150 community living spaces for Alberta Hospital Edmonton patients**

Alberta Health Services also announced today an agreement with Covenant Health to open 150 community beds next May at Villa Caritas. The agreement follows through on a commitment, made when the decision not to redevelop Alberta Hospital Edmonton (AHE) was announced in August, to open new community spaces as quickly as possible. Discussions on community living capacity, in addition to the 150 new Villa Caritas beds, are ongoing and new openings will be announced as agreements are negotiated.

Today's announcement includes beds at Villa Caritas for elderly patients with dementia and other complex mental illnesses, as well as patients waiting in hospitals because no community-based options are available.

In total, 246 AHE beds are involved in the decision not to redevelop. Over the next three years some patients, depending on their care needs, will be transferred to existing acute care hospitals, others will remain in the forensic unit at AHE in the newest building on site, and others will move to new community living care options as they come on stream. *Again, all hospital beds will be staffed until new community-based capacity is created.*

## **800 new community living spaces in the Edmonton and Calgary areas**

Every day about 350 patients are waiting in Edmonton and Calgary hospital beds when more appropriate care could be provided in the community. “Treating these patients in hospital when they should be receiving care in the community is neither right for the patient nor an effective use of health resources,” said Alberta Health Services President and Chief Executive Officer, Dr. Stephen Duckett. “Increasing community care means that people at home or in purpose-designed facilities will have greater access to community facilities, and decreases the risk that they will require hospitalization.”

In total there are about 8,000 hospital beds across Alberta. The timing of the adjustment in the number of hospital beds will depend on how fast Alberta Health Services can bring community care spaces on stream over the next three years. Growth in community living options is being accelerated. Agreements are in place or are being negotiated.

“Changing the balance of community and acute care will make three things possible: We can immediately increase the number of beds available to ease pressure on Emergency Departments, we can accelerate the previously planned increases in the number of community living options available to patients waiting in hospital for more appropriate care, and we free up \$2.3 million to fund maternity nursing positions,” Duckett said.

Both Edmonton and Calgary will invest about \$13 million each in expanded community care programs. “The cost savings in expanding the number of community living options while adjusting the number of hospital beds is significant, estimated to be between \$35 million and \$50 million, but let me be clear that this plan specifically addresses those patients in hospitals who should be receiving care and treatment in the community, and that hospital beds will continue to be staffed as needed until new community living options are up and running,” Duckett said. “There is no room for doubt on that commitment.

“We will move as quickly as is prudent, knowing that coordination is imperative. At the same time, we cannot ignore the need to move over the next two or three years to ensure spending is in line with resources,” said Duckett.

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