



NEWS RELEASE

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MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID GETS NEW LEADERSHIP

CALGARY - The Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) will assume responsibility for administration of the Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) program this spring. The program is being transferred from Alberta Health Services (AHS).

The term 'Mental Health First Aid' refers to the help provided to a person developing a mental health problem or experiencing a mental health crisis. For over four years the program has been teaching people across Canada how to respond to mental health emergencies, enabling them to better manage potential or developing mental health problems in themselves, a family member, a friend or colleague.

"People already understand it's critical to deal with physical emergencies quickly," says Louise Bradley, Chief Operating Officer for the MHCC. "It is just as important not to neglect a mental health emergency."

Cathy Pryce, Vice President of Addiction and Mental Health with Alberta Health Services, says "Alberta Health Services is pleased the Mental Health Commission of Canada will provide national leadership and coordination of the Mental Health First Aid program. With their guidance, the program will continue to grow and we look forward to supporting this work."

Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) originated in Australia and is now available in 14 countries. The Canadian program was coordinated by the Alberta Mental Health Board prior to being merged into Alberta Health Services.

More than 19,000 people have been trained across Canada. The program is available to anyone interested in learning mental health first aid, as well as employees such as human resource managers, teachers, counselors, transit workers, nurses and police officers.

MHFA does not teach people how to be therapists but does teach how to:

- Recognize the signs and symptoms of mental health problems
- Provide initial help
- Guide a person towards appropriate professional help

MHFA also offers a basic instructor course to equip those who want to train others in mental health first aid and an instructor course specifically for people who work directly with youth. The program has 270 instructors across Canada and will continue to operate out of Edmonton.

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“Mental Health First Aid fits in very well with the Commission’s mandate, particularly our anti-stigma initiative, Opening Minds, and the development of our Knowledge Exchange Center,” says Bradley. “We are really looking forward to having this program as part of the Commission.”

The Mental Health Commission of Canada is a non-profit organization created to focus national attention on mental health issues. The MHCC does not provide services, but rather acts as a catalyst for action. Although funded by the federal government, it operates at arm’s length from government.

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