



A M H B

ALBERTA MENTAL HEALTH BOARD

... *Advancing Mental Health*

NEWS RELEASE

**March 23, 2006
Edmonton, AB**

For immediate release

**Alberta Mental Health Board introduces *Mental Health First Aid*
-- first time groundbreaking course offered in Canada**

(Edmonton, Alberta)... It's not a good story...

- In Canada, more than 50 per cent of people who have a mental illness will not seek treatment due to the stigma and shame they feel.
- In Canada, depression alone surpasses heart disease as the leading cause of disability.
- In Canada, mental illness is estimated to cost \$33 billion annually in lost productivity.

All sobering statistics and ones that can often be managed with the right treatment, support from family and community and an understanding employer. Unfortunately, the reality is often far different.

From March 20 to 31, the Alberta Mental Health Board, health regions and other partners are offering Mental Health First Aid instructor training to about 20 people in Edmonton and Calgary. The purpose of the course is to improve mental health literacy -- provide the skills and knowledge to help people better manage potential or developing mental health problems in themselves, a family member, a friend or a work colleague.

Mental Health First Aid is based on the model of medical first aid. However, it is tailored specifically to providing *help to those experiencing mental health problems* before professional help is obtained. It is not intended to train people to diagnose or treat health problems.

Mental Health First Aid was developed and introduced by Professors Tony Jorm and Betty Kitchener from the Centre for Mental Health Research at The Australian National University in 2001. Since 2005 the program has been sponsored by the ORYGEN Research Centre at the University of Melbourne.

More than 25,000 people have taken this 12-hour course throughout Australia as well as Scotland, Hong Kong and New York. What makes the program unique is that evaluations have shown positive results in terms of changing participant behavior well after they finish the course.

“We recognize that we must raise awareness and understanding that a mental illness is no different from a physical illness such as cancer, diabetes or heart disease,” says Ray Block, President and CEO of the Alberta Mental Health Board. “Until we accomplish that goal, our success in tackling the escalating rates of mental illness in our province and throughout Canada will not be achieved.”



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The two courses in Edmonton and Calgary will be conducted by Betty Kitchener, Program Director, Mental Health First Aid in Australia. Participants will be trained as instructors for Mental Health First Aid so that future sessions can be organized and taught to the general public and other interested people by those people currently enrolled.

The Mental Health First Aid course will then be offered to service providers, family members affected by mental illness, the general public and employers.

People who would like more information about the Mental Health First Aid Program can attend a videoconference on March 30, 2006. For details call (403) 297-3678.

- 30 -

Note to media : Media are invited to observe the Mental Health First Aid training session at the Westin Hotel between 10 and 12 p.m. tomorrow, Friday, March 24. At that time Betty Kitchener, Program Director, will be available for interviews.

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