

Bed Closures at Alberta Hospital: An Update

In the October issue of Action Notes, we reported on the Government of Alberta's plans to close acute care beds at Edmonton's Alberta Hospital and transfer people into community based services. Since then, a steady outcry from stakeholders, advocates, medical professionals, city officials, and the police department has moved the government to put the plan on hold.

In response to the outcry, Premier Ed Stelmach formed a committee, which will make recommendations to Alberta Health Services to guide the transition. The committee is co-chaired by Dennis Anderson, mental health advocate and founding member of the Alberta Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health, and Don Sieben, board member with Alberta Health Services. The committee's task is to provide guidance and recommendations on future bed closures. No beds will be closed at Alberta Hospital until the committee produces recommendations for a seamless transition from institutional care to community care. It is hoped the government will use these recommendations to create reasonable timelines and ensure that the proper supports are in place before patients are moved into the community. The recommendations are expected to be brought forward in February, 2010.

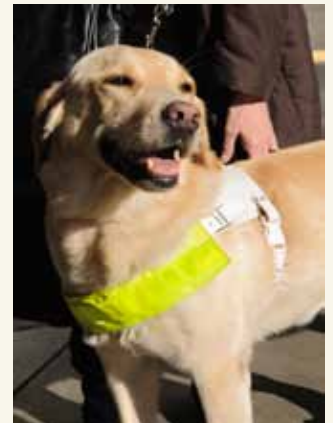


As we have stated before, ACCD supports a move from institutionalized care to community based care, as long as the proper supports are in place. We were relieved to see that plans to rap-

idly close beds at Alberta Hospital have been slowed, and we are optimistic that the government will work closely with the committee to arrive at a solution. Although ACCD understands that we are experiencing tough economic times, we urge the government to make decisions that ensure the health and well being of persons with mental illnesses are protected as they move to community based care.

Alberta's Service Dogs Act

On January 1, 2009, Alberta's Service Dog Act came into effect. The Act ensures that people with disabilities can bring their service dogs with them wherever they need to go. This includes taxi cabs, public buildings, and rental accommodations where pets generally aren't allowed. To determine how the act has benefited service dog users, a staff member at ACCD contacted Dogs with Wings, a non-profit organization that specializes in training service dogs for Albertans with disabilities.



Dogs with Wings' Executive Director, John Wheelwright, praised the new act. He says it has improved the lives of service dog users by guaranteeing rights and removing barriers, such as landlord discrimination, and refusal of service by people who are uneasy about having animals in their establishments. Wheelwright was quick to add that Albertans have traditionally been pretty good about accommodating service dogs and their users, but there have always been occasional complaints.

Part of the benefit of the Service Dog Act is its simplicity. The clauses within the act are straightforward and easy to understand, which has resulted in very little dispute over interpre-

tation. That being said, there have been a few interpretation anomalies, such as determining if the act applies to dogs in training. But, as Wheelwright pointed out, "these problems affect trainers more than users." All in all, it appears the act is a success.

Do you have a service dog? What are your thoughts on the Service Dogs Act? ACCD would love to hear from you. To share your story, please contact ACCD's office at 780-488-9088, 1-800-387-2514, or accd@accd.net.

PDD's Budget Revision: Less Money than Expected for Service Providers

Last April, when the Government of Alberta announced the provincial budget for 2009-2010, families and individuals who receive supports through Persons with Developmental Disabilities (PDD) were pleased that money to help service providers recruit and retain staff was included in the budget. The announcement stated that PDD's budget would be 604 million dollars, an increase of 33 million from the previous year, or 5.8%. Of that 33 million, 24.2 million would be dispersed to PDD service providers for recruitment and retention purposes.

Having more money in the system for recruitment and retention would relieve considerable stress from people who use PDD services, especially those who rely on personal care attendants. On average, care attendants earn between \$11 and \$15 per hour. During the recent boom years, this wage was not competitive enough for people to retain skilled and knowledgeable workers, since employers in other industries were paying equal or greater wages for work that was often far less demanding. Constant turnover meant added stress and frustration for people with developmental disabilities and their families, as they

repeatedly tried to build relationships and routines with a steady stream of new care attendants.

In light of the current fiscal crisis, government has made the tough decision to scale back PDD's funding in the 4th quarter of this fiscal year. Now, instead of 24.2 million in funding over the course of the year, 14.4 million will be provided to service providers across Alberta, in the form of a one-time cash injection. The money can be used to cover training costs or to pay bonuses to frontline staff.

When ACCD contacted PDD to get more details on this situation, we were told the cuts to budgets are meant to help the program withstand economic uncertainty. There is a worry that deeper cuts could be coming in next year's budget; layoffs might be necessary to balance wages against future budget shortfalls.

Nevertheless, ACCD is concerned about what these cuts to PDD budgets will mean for people with developmental disabilities and their families.

ACCD urges the Government of Alberta to work along side people with developmental disabilities, their families, and service providers to come to an agreeable resolution for Albertans with developmental disabilities and their families.



HAPPY NEW YEAR!
MAY 2010 BRING
YOU HAPPINESS,
SUCCESS AND JOY!



Together, We Hold The Power!

Full Participation - Accessibility - Equity