

2008

PRESERVATION OF MENTAL HEALTH CARE FACILITIES

The costs associated with the provision of social assistance to people with mental disabilities represent a very significant cost to all levels of government. Furthermore, as upwards of 90 percent of people suffering from serious mental disabilities are unemployed, the loss of these people to the labour market is unfortunate and costly – both from the perspective of the patient and of the potential employer. While the myriad of mental health care issues faced by British Columbians are not necessarily unique, the Chamber takes note of what may reasonably be considered a disproportionate number of people in the province suffering from mental illness either associated with or suffered in combination with acute drug addiction.

There has been a trend in recent years towards “de-institutionalization” and the re-integration of the mentally ill into the community. While the Chamber recognizes that in many cases this is laudable and clearly in the best interests of the patient, his or her family and the community at large, the Chamber expresses concern where decisions of this nature are made (or appear to be made) for reasons of fiscal constraint rather than pursuant to a sound health care policy.

Of particular concern to the Chamber is the potential loss of physical facilities which have historically been intended for use by mental health care providers. There is consensus among mental health care providers and advocates that the physical surrounding in which mental health care services are provided can play an important part in treating and managing many forms of mental illness. The loss of these facilities can represent a significant setback in the management of mental health care services in the province. This has recently been highlighted by the debate over the potential commercial redevelopment of the Riverview Hospital lands in Coquitlam, however other smaller examples exist throughout the province as the manner in which community mental health care services are provided is revisited by the province. The effect of removing these facilities from the mental health care system is two-fold: First, the facilities themselves can be expected to be irretrievably lost, principally to commercial development. Second, the likelihood of finding comparable facilities in the future will always be difficult in light of the persistent “not in my backyard” feeling that many people feel when confronted with proposals to develop mental health care facilities in their communities.

With this in mind, it is the view of the Chamber that the province must carefully protect existing mental health care facilities and should give specific consideration to taking facilities issues into special account when making future mental health care decisions and policies.

THE CHAMBER RECOMMENDS

That the provincial government:

1. confirm its commitment to the preservation and enhancement across the province of lands and facilities which have as their historical and principal purpose the provision of mental health care services;
2. in making decisions relating to the addition or deletion of lands and buildings intended principally for use in the provision of mental health care services, give paramount importance to both the input of mental health care providers and the views of the surrounding communities, in each case in priority to concerns of a commercial nature;
3. in addition to the provision and enhancement of existing mental health care services, place urgent and immediate priority in developing a comprehensive strategy, in conjunction with all other levels of government, community stakeholders and health care providers, aimed at identifying, treating and managing drug addiction in the province;
4. in furtherance of the foregoing, give particular priority to the preservation and enhancement of Riverview Hospital and its existing lands as British Columbia's principal class residential and out patient mental health care services for people across the province, including the treatment of drug addiction.