

May 3, 2006

Updated standards raise the bar for continuing care

Implementation of new provincial standards to begin immediately

Edmonton... Reflecting the province's commitment to Albertans and the recommendation of the MLA Task Force on Continuing Care, the Government of Alberta is implementing new and updated standards for continuing care health and accommodation services immediately.

The new standards lay the groundwork for a higher quality of life and health care for all Albertans receiving continuing care services in home, community and facility-based settings. The standards were developed after months of feedback to the task force from continuing care residents and their families, industry stakeholders, facility operators and regional health authorities.

"The best guide we can have for appropriate health services are the approximately 100,000 Albertans in continuing care," said Iris Evans, Minister of Health and Wellness. "The new health service standards encourage more participation from residents and their families into their care and how it is delivered."

"These new standards will improve the quality and consistency of accommodation services for Albertans in long-term care and supportive living facilities across the province. The standards are key to maintaining the well-being of residents and providing their family members with peace of mind, knowing their loved one is receiving the services that they need," said Yvonne Fritz, Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

The Continuing Care Health Service Standards cover all publicly-funded health care services for continuing care residents and include:

- an enhanced role of the resident, client and family in an individual's assessment and care planning;
- improved monitoring and reporting processes by both regional health authorities and Alberta Health and Wellness and;
- recognition of wellness initiatives that focus on maintaining and improving the health of clients.

The accommodation standards for all long-term care and supportive living facilities include:

- maintaining a safe and comfortable environment for residents;
- nutritious meals that meet *Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating*;
- routine cleaning and housekeeping of resident rooms and common areas; and
- mandatory criminal record checks for new employees and volunteers.

In addition, long-term care and supportive living operators will also be required to participate in a recognized accreditation program, which will promote best practices and continuous quality improvement.

Introducing the standards now provides facilities and operators with time to make the appropriate changes to reach full compliance by April 2007. Over the coming months, information and training sessions will provide continuing care operators and staff with a full understanding of the standards and the processes to monitor them. As well, some of the standards will require regulatory or legislative changes, which will be completed by next spring.

The new health service and accommodation standards are available at www.continuingcare.gov.ab.ca, along with the task force's final report *Achieving Excellence in Continuing Care*.

Backgrounder attached.

Media enquiries may be directed to:

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Backgrounder

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Funding for continuing care

Alberta Health and Wellness is responsible for all health care services in continuing care, including staffing and prescription drugs. In addition to the \$26 million that addressed the pressing recommendations of the MLA Task Force report, Health and Wellness received an additional \$42 million in the 2006/2007 budget to support the task force's priority recommendations. Base spending on all continuing care services by regional health authorities is anticipated to be about \$1.1 billion for 2006/2007. Recent initiatives include:

- increasing the number of hours of care to 3.6 hours per resident per day from 3.1 hours in 2004-05;
- implementing a safe lift policy in all long term care facilities;
- fast tracking a new care planning and assessment system;
- reviewing medication use and administration in continuing care;
- increasing access to therapy;
- implementing new health care standards; and
- improving case co-ordination.

Alberta Seniors and Community Supports is responsible for accommodation services including food, building security and housekeeping, as well as benefits for low-income Albertans living in continuing care. The Seniors and Community Supports' budget increased by \$30 million to \$40 million annually to improve the system for Albertans by:

- enhancing benefits for low-income seniors and AISH clients in designated assisted living and long-term care facilities, as well as to help senior couples stay together;
- increasing grants for many seniors lodges to support the needs of seniors and address growing operating costs;
- supporting Albertans with disabilities to access services in their community;
- implementing new continuing care accommodation standards;
- introducing updated monitoring, reporting and enforcement processes; and
- developing a new concerns resolution process for continuing care residents and their families.

Continuing care funding will continue to increase over the next three years. By 2008-09, annual funding for continuing care initiatives is projected to increase by \$127 million.

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