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For immediate release

Program helps men cope with life's tough times

(Camrose, Alberta) – The Alberta Mental Health Board (AMHB) and East Central Health (ECH) announced today in Camrose the launch of Men at Risk – an innovative mental health program designed to increase awareness and knowledge of stress, depression and potential for suicidal behaviour.

Males in Alberta, across Canada, and around the globe typically have a higher rate of suicide than females. Adult men are at particularly high risk. In Alberta, the rate of suicide among men between the ages of 35 and 59 in 2001/02 was 33 per 100,000 population. That means that for every 100,000 men of that age in Alberta in that year, 33 of them died by suicide. The average rate for all Albertans (male and female of all ages) during that period was approximately 15 per 100,000. In East Central Health, the rate of suicide is 18.9 per 100,000, slightly higher than the provincial average.

Middle-aged men have been identified as an 'at-risk' group as outlined in the recently launched *A Call to Action: The Alberta Suicide Prevention Strategy*. The Men at Risk Program meets key goals of the strategy by enhancing the mental health and well-being among Albertans and improving intervention and treatment programs for those at risk of suicide.

With funding from the AMHB and East Central Health, the Men at Risk Program will be available to all men – with emphasis on those who work in trades, industry and agriculture, the major employer groups in Alberta. Friends, families, co-workers and supervisors can also benefit from the program.

“The AMHB is proud to support this important program in East Central Health,” says Dr. John Read, Chair of the AMHB. “It is innovative approaches like the Men at Risk Program that will help men realize they are not alone and that help is available.”

What makes this program both unique and successful is that facilitators and volunteers come from the very employment sectors it targets. Because it is men helping other men, it reduces the stigma associated with seeking help that men continue to struggle with.

“East Central Health is pleased to be partnering with the AMHB on this vital program,” says ECH Board Chair Ed Andersen. “Our region encounters the same challenges as other areas of Alberta with many men going through tough times and they are often not aware of or willing to seek help. This new program will go a long way towards correcting that situation.”



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The program delivers information in different locations through displays, articles and presentations about the signs of distress, depression, warning signs of suicide and resources for getting help.

The Men at Risk Program is an Alberta-based initiative first developed in 1999 by the Grande Prairie and Area Safe Communities, PACE (Providing Assistance, Counselling and Education) and the Suicide Prevention Resource Centre, with assistance from Peace Country Health. Staff and volunteers of the Men at Risk Program in Grande Prairie will be sharing their wisdom, knowledge and expertise with East Central Health to assist in implementing this innovative program.

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The Alberta Mental Health Board is a provincial health authority that oversees and advances Alberta's mental health system, serves in an advisory capacity to the Minister of Alberta Health and Wellness, and works with health regions and others to address system-wide mental health priority issues that span regional, provincial and organizational boundaries.

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