

Check Against Delivery

Bell Youth Mental Health Announcement October 8, 2014, Calgary Honourable Heather Klimchuk, Minister, Human Services

Good morning Chamber members, Bell Canada President and CEO Mr. George Cope, Dr. Robbie Babins-Wagner, CEO of the Calgary Counselling Centre, ladies and gentlemen.

I'd like to recognize Education Minister Gordon Dirks and Calgary-Buffalo MLA Kent Hehr who are also with us here this morning.

This is certainly an early morning for all of us... but it's great to start it off with a fantastic breakfast.

As we share a meal and table conversation this morning... it's important to remember that we're here today as we all recognize the importance of our topic.

I'd also like to take a moment to recognize that tomorrow is National Depression Screening Day.

Depression is a serious issue... not just in the workplace... but in each of our personal lives as well.

Ultimately... mental illness has... or will affect all of us... as one in five people will experience a mental illness in their lifetime.

The remaining four will have a friend... relative... or colleague who will be affected.

This is why we all need to be aware of what our children are experiencing.

According to 2011 statistics... more than 6.7 million people in Canada are living with a mental illness.

Of these... more than one million were children and adolescents between the ages of nine and 19 years of age.

That's why we must reach out to our young people with the critical support they need.

I'm proud to represent Premier Prentice and my government colleagues... as we join Bell Canada for this announcement today.

Most mental health problems start when people are young – and yet so many young people may struggle in silence because of the stigma around mental illness.

They also may not know where to turn to for help.

Adolescence can be a difficult time at best... and with today's convenient access to media and the Internet... it can be challenging for them to find the information they need.

There are resources and supports available... but they need to be more visible and accessible to young people.

We know that more and more youth are using technology to find support and access resources.

That's why it's so important that this initiative will bring more mental health resources to an online format... where children and youth are more likely to look for information.

The Internet can provide an on-line gateway for them to explore mental health and addiction issues whenever and however they choose.

The Government of Alberta is delighted that Bell Canada has chosen Alberta as the first provincial jurisdiction in Canada to support the creation of a one-stop... web-based Alberta information resource.

This resource will link existing online... phone and community mental health and addiction supports and services for children... youth and families.

It will also directly benefit organizations like the Calgary Counselling Centre.

The seeds of this morning's announcement were first planted in February of this year... when Bell Canada approached the Government of Alberta to propose a partnership that included \$1 million in funding from Bell Canada.

Today... I am pleased to share that the Government of Alberta will match that funding with \$1 million.

We are also working together as a Government on a cross-ministry mental health action plan.

This will enhance and sustain a high level of supports for children involved with child intervention in our province.

It will expand our reach to support all children and families with mental health needs in Alberta.

Early identification and intervention of addiction and mental health issues can prevent more costly issues from developing later in life.

I am committed to supporting Alberta families as they are, quite literally... our future!

The funding we've announced today will not only support Alberta children... youth... and their families... but also teachers... mental health professionals and caregivers.

I also applaud the Calgary Counselling Centre as they are promoting the use of an anonymous online depression screening test for youth engaged with technology.

The test is hosted on their website until the end of the week.

The goal of this test is to help young people find out within minutes whether they should seek help for depression – and it can be taken on a smartphone... laptop or tablet.

Tools like this will help us make a difference in identifying children and youth in the early stages of vulnerability... so we can support them before their situation becomes critical.

We are proud to join Bell Canada as we take this important first step together towards making it easier and quicker for Alberta children... youth and their families to access vital resources and support.

Thank you again for the invitation to be here with you this morning... and enjoy the rest of your day!