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## Changes to the *Protection for Persons in Care Act*

Alberta's *Protection for Persons in Care Act* (Act) is important legislation designed to promote the prevention of abuse of adults who receive government-funded care or support services.

After more than 10 years, the Act has been re-written to emphasize the importance of reporting abuse and the prevention of abuse. The re-written Act is expected to be proclaimed in the spring of 2010.

### **Purpose of the Act**

The new legislation builds upon the strengths of the current Act and will improve protection for Albertans by emphasizing the prevention of abuse and including enforcement mechanisms.

The Act:

1. Requires reporting of abuse involving clients;
2. Requires independent reviews of reports of abuse; and,
3. Promotes the prevention of abuse involving clients.

### **Who the Act Applies To**

The new Act still applies to service providers who receive funds from the Government of Alberta, directly or indirectly, for the provision of care or support services, including nursing homes, hospitals, group homes, seniors' lodges, shelters and other supportive living settings.

In the Act, care or support services means any services that relate to a client's health, or physical or psychological well-being.

In addition, the new Act applies to mental health facilities designated under the *Mental Health Act*. Additional service providers are also specified in the regulations of the Act.

### **Definitions**

**Abuse** is an act or omission that causes serious bodily harm, serious emotional harm, and includes misappropriating a significant amount of money and sexual abuse.

The **client** is the individual who is the victim of the alleged abuse. The client must have been receiving care or support services from a service provider at the time the abuse occurred.

The **individual involved** is any person who allegedly abused a client or who allegedly failed to prevent abuse of a client.

### **What Does Not Constitute Abuse**

There are certain acts or omissions that do not constitute abuse. It is not abuse when:

- (a) service providers carry out their duties in accordance with professional standards or practices or any standards established under other legislation;
- (b) the care or support services provided are reasonably necessary in the circumstances;
- (c) the act or omission is the result of or attributable to a client refusing care or support services; and,
- (d) the act or omission is based on a decision made on behalf of a client by an agent under the *Personal Directives Act* or by an attorney under the *Powers of Attorney Act*.

There are additional circumstances that do not constitute abuse in the regulations of the Act.

### **Duties of Service Providers**

The Act reflects a commitment to improve the safety, security, and well-being of adults who access care and support services in Alberta.

The Act sets out the following duties:

- All service providers, employees of service providers and others who provide care or support services to clients must take reasonable steps to protect clients from abuse while providing care or support services, and to maintain a reasonable level of safety for clients.
- When notified of a report of abuse, service providers must take all reasonable steps to provide for the immediate safety, security and well-being of the client and any other clients who may be at risk of abuse.
- All service providers are required to make the information in this Act available to all clients, volunteers, employees and contractors.
- All service providers must require a criminal records check from every successful employment applicant, every new volunteer and any other individual engaged by the service provider to provide care or support services.

**Any person who fails to comply with these duties may be guilty of an offence.** Individuals can be fined up to \$10,000 and service providers up to \$100,000.

### **Reporting Abuse**

Reporting abuse is mandatory. In the new Act, there is a requirement that abuse be reported as soon as

reasonably possible. **Failure to report abuse is an offence.**

If a client has been subjected to abuse, it is optional for them to report it. If they choose to report the abuse, they must do so no later than two years from the date the alleged abuse occurred.

### **To report abuse:**

- Call the Protection for Persons in Care reporting line, 1-888-357-9339, Monday to Friday from 8:15 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. The reporting line is **not** a crisis line.
- Call the police if a person's life or well-being is in immediate danger, or if the abuse is criminal in nature.
- If the incident involves a professional, such as a registered nurse or a physician, reports of abuse may be made directly to the applicable professional association.
- Call the Mental Health Patient Advocate if the abuse involved a client detained in a mental health facility or subject to a community treatment order.

People who report abuse must provide their name and contact information, and reasonable details of the incident. Anonymous reports are not allowed.

The identity of the complainant (the person reporting the abuse) will be disclosed if the abuse report is referred to the police or other body for investigation; the matter is appealed; and when required to do so by law.

Individuals who make malicious or false reports of abuse may be guilty of an offence and fined up to \$10,000.

### **Review of Abuse Reports**

Every abuse report received by the Protection for Persons in Care (PPC) office must be reviewed by a complaints officer who will decide whether an investigation is necessary. Complaints officers may make inquiries of any person and may take any other action they consider appropriate in the circumstances.

The complaints officer may refuse to review or discontinue the review of an abuse report if it was made more than two years after the date of the alleged abuse or if the complaints officer believes the report is frivolous, vexatious or made in bad faith. In these situations, the complainant (person reporting abuse) has the right to have the complaints officer's decision reviewed by the PPC director.

### **Investigations of Abuse**

If the complaints officer decides that an investigation is necessary, the abuse report is referred to an investigator. Investigators may interview the client and any other person who might be able to provide information. Investigators can access any records relevant to the investigation, including health information, personal information and financial information in the custody or control of any person.

Investigators submit a final report to the PPC director, stating whether the abuse was founded or not founded. Investigators may make any recommendation they consider appropriate and must provide reasons.

### **Director's Decision**

After reviewing the investigator's final report, the director will make a decision and specify the steps or measures the service provider or individual involved

must take to prevent abuse of clients. In the decision, the director may approve or reject the investigator's recommendations. The director may take any other appropriate action. The director must provide a copy of the decision, with reasons for the decision, to the complainant, service provider, client, individual involved and any other person the director considers appropriate.

The director must also notify the complainant, service provider, client and individual involved of the right to appeal the decision. Appealing the Director's decision to an appeal panel must be initiated within 15 days of receiving the Director's decision.

Anyone who fails to comply with the director's decision is guilty of an offence and may be subject to fines of up to \$10,000 for individuals and \$100,000 for service providers.

**For More Information**  
**Protection for Persons in Care**  
**information and reporting line**  
1-888-357-9339  
[www.seniors.alberta.ca](http://www.seniors.alberta.ca)

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