

# AIDS Awareness Week

This past week (October 2 to 8) has been AIDS Awareness Week; it's a kick-off for a year-long campaign to raise awareness of the issues surrounding HIV and AIDS.

For the 1995 AIDS Awareness Campaign, the Canadian AIDS Society has chosen to address the issue of AIDS and homophobia. Homophobia is defined as negative personal attitudes or behaviors towards gays and lesbians.

"Homophobia is a great barrier to effective AIDS education. Many people still believe that if they are not gay, they are not at any risk of acquiring HIV...Many people do not want to discuss gay or lesbian sexuality, at a time when we need to address sexuality in all of its diversity in order to be effective in prevention efforts," says Bruce Clarke, an educator with the Halton Regional Health Department, AIDS Program. "Homophobia and AIDS are firmly linked in the minds of many Canadians...In too many cases, homophobia has a negative impact on

the quality of care received by a person living with HIV/AIDS, regardless of that person's sexual orientation."

The goal of this year's campaign is to work towards removing the stigma surrounding the disease, encouraging a more compassionate, humane response to gay people and all people living with HIV/AIDS in Canada.

"Homophobia is everyone's problem," says Clarke. "Like other kinds of prejudice, it's learned."

Two all-day workshops on working with gay, lesbian and bisexual youth for people who work with youth in Halton Region were organized by the Halton Regional Health Department, a Sexual Health and AIDS Programs was held on October 2 and 3, at the Halton Regional Centre, 1151 Bronte Road, Oakville.

The Health Department is also holding a forum for family physicians, to be held in Oakville on October 11. Area libraries were displaying and distributing information on HIV/AIDS during AIDS Awareness Week.

## Health Council approves program

Halton District Health Council approved a \$684,000 funding proposal for the development of a regional assertive community treatment team for people with severe mental illness.

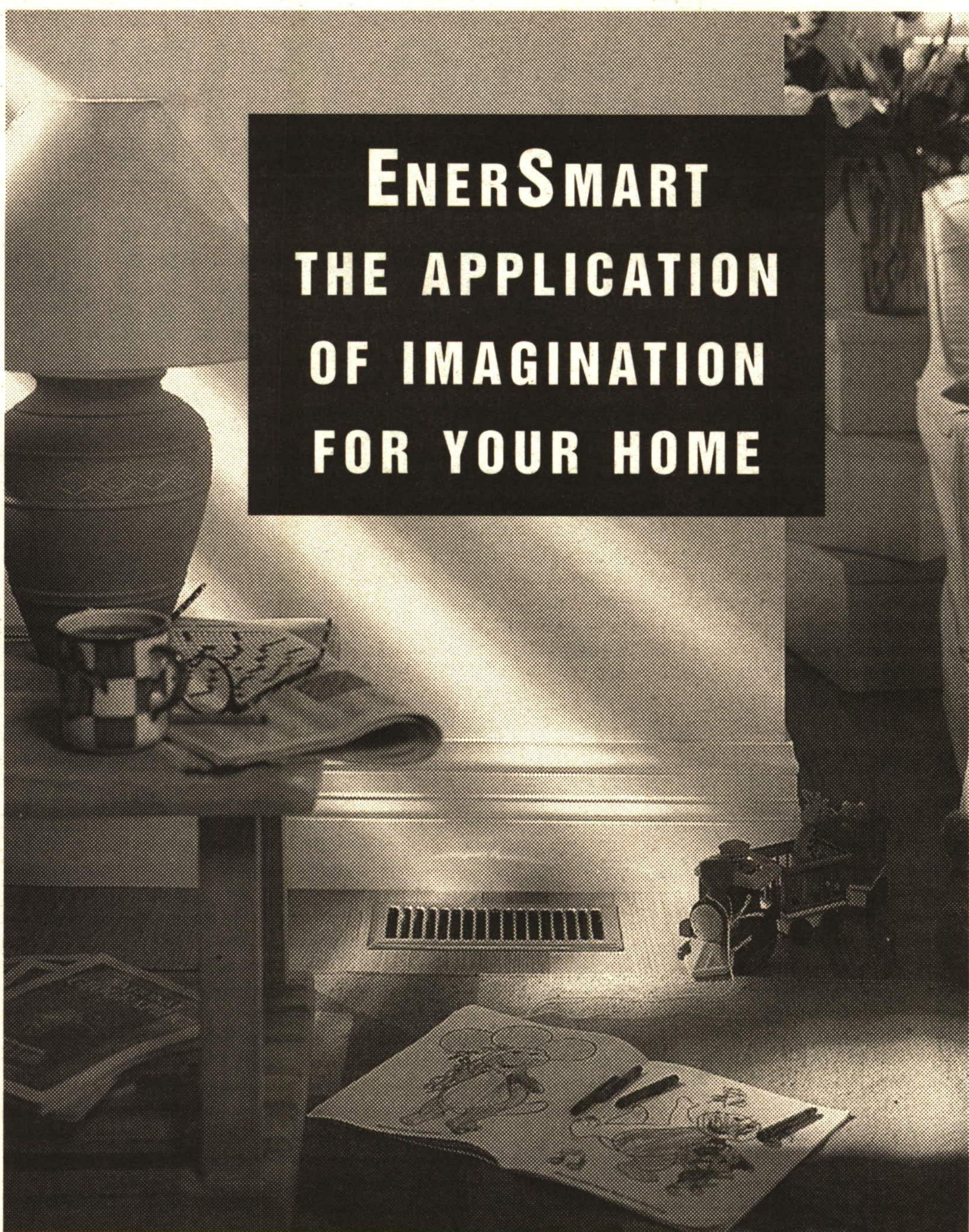
The Ministry of Health is providing funds to enhance community supports for people with severe mental illness as government prepares to reduce the number of psychiatric beds in the province from 58 beds per 100,000 to 30 beds per 100,000 by the year 2003.

The regional assertive community

treatment team will provide a broad range of supports to the most seriously mentally ill people living in Halton.

Joseph Brant Memorial Hospital, lead agency for the regional project, will develop a Regional Advisory Committee to provide advice and direction on the implementation of the assertive community treatment team.

The Ministry of Health has final approval for the project. Their decision will be made in November.



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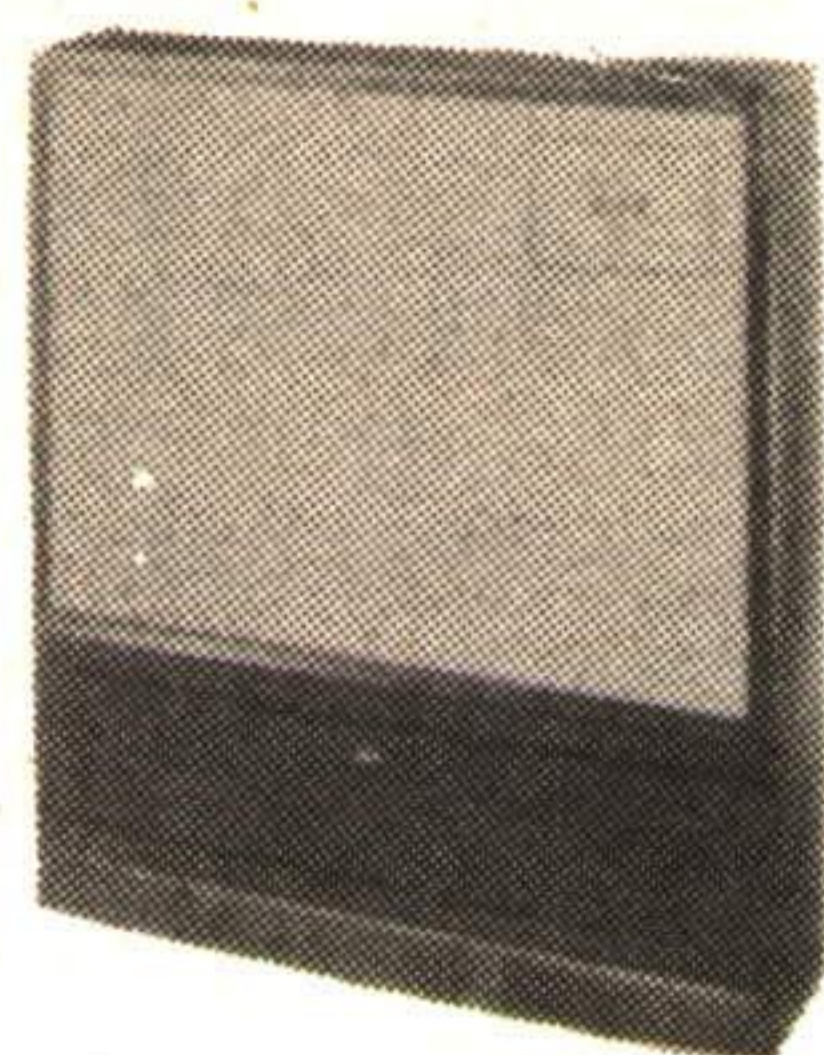
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