

CHALLENGES

FACT

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"STIGMA" IN GREEK REFERS TO A PERSON OF LESS VALUE; A "BLEMISHED PERSON"



With **1 in 5 Canadians** facing mental health issues, it is surprising that access — to good information, care, and support — continues to remain a **major challenge for Canada's healthcare system.**

There is no health without mental health

Imagine your colleagues around the water-cooler. One woman discusses her struggle with depression and anxiety. Another weighs in on her bi-polar disorder. A third shares his family history of schizophrenia.

It's likely not a conversation that would ever happen in your workplace. But it should. With statistics showing that over 3 million Canadians are affected by mental health issues, we've been silent too long. Mental disability is one of Canada's most common illnesses, and is regrettably, also the least understood. Awareness and the right information are critical to understanding the disease and opening up to talk about it will help defeat the stigma.

"If you have knowledge about mental health issues, you can become more compassionate and understanding," says Peter Coleridge, the CEO of the Canadian Mental Health Association.

Creating care

Nationally \$14 billion is spent per year on mental health — which sounds like a good amount, until you realize that it's only 7 percent of total government health spending, according to a 2010 report called the Cost of Mental Health Services in Canada, by the Institute of Health Economics.

"There continues to be significant discrimination and stigma around mental health problems in Canada that is pervasive at the systemic level in terms of funding for services," says Coleridge.

Mental health is unfortunately not regarded as having the same import-

ance as physical health. Thus even if we had the funding to build the ideal mental health system, many people are afraid to access it due to discrimination and stigma.

It's just another disease

Think of the kindness we extend to friends facing cancer, because that is a disease we understand, says Coleridge. Mental illness is just another disease and society needs to provide the resources that help people understand it.

"Once people had a misunderstanding of race and ethnicity and over time we educated, we dealt with

the fear and misunderstanding and shaped different attitudes. And we made policies that don't allow people to discriminate and stigmatize based on race or ethnicity," says Coleridge.

"For mental health we don't have those kinds of policies, and we need them."

Mind-body balance

"When you look at physical health, it's on your radar to do what you can to eat better, to go for a walk, etc." says Coleridge. So why don't we view our mental health the same way?

Research has proven the mind-body connection countless times. "People



Peter Coleridge
CEO,
Canadian Mental
Health Association

with mental health problems are more prone to developing cancers, diabetes and heart disease and so the two are very interconnected but still in our minds we separate them," says Coleridge.

Mental health issues are most likely to take hold when the balance is off. You need to do what you need to do to keep your balance — whether it's spending time with loved ones, reading a book or exercising.

End the shame

"We've more hope now for people with mental illness than we've ever had, but society needs to do more," says Coleridge.

Society needs to invest in the resources so that people understand mental health issues, we need the care to help people make their way, and we need the knowledge and the compassion to put an end to the silence and the shame on this issue that touches the lives of so many people we love.

Together, the government, mental health consumers, educators, the media, stakeholders and other service providers need to work together to promote and advocate the mental health of Canada.

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EVERYDAY TIPS FOR KEEPING MENTALLY HEALTHY

Here are a few healthy practices that can be easily integrated into your daily life.

The idea is that a lot of small, concerted actions can add up to a significant overall effect. Apply some of these ideas on a regular basis and you'll find yourself feeling rejuvenated and more confident:

1 Be in the present: When you're out for a walk or socializing, turn off the cell phone and take in all the sights and sounds around you.

2 'Collect' positive emotional moments: Make a point of thinking about the times when you've felt pleasure, comfort, tenderness, confidence or other positive emotions.

3 Enjoy hobbies: A hobby helps bring balance to your life. You're doing something because you want to, not because you have to.

4 Treat yourself well: It could be a good meal, a bubble bath, a movie, or just sitting in the park enjoying nature. Small daily treats have a cumulative effect.

5 Live a healthier, more active life: Eat healthy foods, be active and get enough sleep. Regular physical activity is good for the mind. It can even reduce depression and anxiety. Share your activity with others; social connections are beneficial too.

SOURCE: CMHA

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It's time we allocate more towards mental health

Mental health is a part of everyone's life. Staying mentally healthy is as important as staying physically healthy. All of us at times feel sad or anxious, grieve the loss of a loved one or lose sleep when stressed.

Research tells us that as many as 1 in 5 Canadians or 20 percent of us could benefit from mental health services each year. The cost of mental illness and addictions to the Canadian economy is billions of dollars annually.

Can you get help when you need it? Sadly, the answer all too often is no. Research shows that only about one-third of adult Canadians and 20 percent of children and teens receive the services they need. These statistics wouldn't be acceptable for cancer or for physical illness.

Why are the services not avail-

able? There are a number of reasons including, for example, the stigma Canadians feel about mental health and getting help, low funding levels for publicly funded services, more government investment in physical health than mental health and addictions, and the privatization of many services including those of psychologists.

More funding

To help solve this problem, the Mental Health Commission of Canada has called for an increase in government funding for mental health and addictions. Currently the Commission estimates that provincial governments spend, on average, about 7.5 percent of their total health budgets on mental health and addictions. The rest is spent on physical health services. The Commission urges all governments to move to a minimum of 9 percent

of the total health budget for mental health and addictions over the next 10 years. The Commission is also calling for social services to spend a minimum of 2 percent of their budgets for mental health and addictions services such as supportive housing.

Accessibility to services

Canadians often don't realize that many hospitals, community health centres and primary care practices do not include psychological services. Schools often provide services, but the wait time can be as long as 2 years. As a result, many psychological services are provided in the private sector, and are not covered by provincial and territorial health plans. This means that people who can afford it receive world class services.

It also means that many low and middle income Canadians often can't access psychological services. This

is a real problem since psychologists are the largest profession of regulated mental health specialists in Canada.

Governments are doing more in the mental health field and are to be supported in their efforts. However, the situation is dire and more needs to be done quickly. The report Public Services for Ontarians: a Path to Sustainability and Excellence (2012) by Mr Donald Drummond, an economist commissioned by the Ontario Government, strongly recommended more investment in mental health services during these times of economic difficulty because of historic underfunding. He clearly stated that a larger share of the overall health budget should be allocated to mental health and addictions which supports the recommendation of the Mental Health Commission.

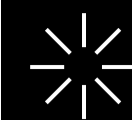
These actions are necessary for a number of reasons including the

money saved on the costs that occur across a lifetime for untreated mental health problems and disorders and the improvement of the economy. He also noted, on more than one occasion, the need for more psychological and counselling services.

Our current system is very poor in terms of the resources it has available to those in need of mental health care. It's time that policy makers, government, business owners, and health-care professionals come together to ensure that quality mental health care and access to the proper support and services are available and to all Canadians.

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WE RECOMMEND



The SLAM Plan
Michael Landsberg speaks about his battle with depression.

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"I think that people gravitate towards me (a) out of desperation (b) because I...am not ashamed of this illness."

A psychologically healthy workplace p. 4
What can organizations do?

Overcoming the challenges of Schizophrenia p. 7
Schizophrenia is a complex mental condition that affects 1 percent of the population.

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