

CANADIAN ALLIANCE
ON MENTAL ILLNESS
AND MENTAL HEALTH



ALLIANCE CANADIENNE
POUR LA MALADIE MENTALE
ET LA SANTÉ MENTALE

141 Laurier Avenue West/Ouest, Suite 701, Ottawa, ON, K1P 5J3

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Improved mental health literacy key to critical health issue warns national alliance at opening of Mental Health Week

Ottawa, Ontario (May 5, 2008)

The Canadian Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health (CAMIMH) today marked the opening of Mental Health Week in Canada by highlighting the critical need to improve the mental health literacy of Canadians. Nearly 6 million Canadians are likely to experience a diagnosable mental illness over their lifetimes and 3% of Canadians likely to live with a serious mental illness. CAMIMH believes that increasing understanding of mental health issues will pave the way for reducing the stigma associated with this critical health issue and improving the prevention and treatment of mental illness.

“Mental health is the most important health issue confronting Canadians today,” said Constance McKnight, Chair of the Canadian Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health (CAMIMH). “We are working to increase the mental health literacy of Canadians, and support the Mental Health Commission of Canada in their effort to reduce the stigma associated with mental illness and to develop a national strategy for mental health and mental illness.”

In 2007 the Alliance’s Mental Health Literacy Project assessed what Canadians know and how they think about mental health and mental illness through extensive surveying and focus groups. The findings were compared to data gathered in other countries, and found that Canadians’ mental health literacy seems to be on par with citizens in other countries, and it is recognized that two-thirds of Canadians know that mental health problems are common. However, while most Canadians know that mental health issues are common and seem to have a good understanding of causes and triggers, stigma and shame still play a great part in why people do not actively seek help.

The Mental Health Commission of Canada has applauded CAMIMH'S efforts to develop a national strategy on Mental Health Literacy. “Mental Health Literacy is an essential element of a comprehensive mental health strategy and an integral element of addressing stigma and discrimination. The Commission looks forward to a spirit of collaboration as we collectively move towards the development of a national strategy on mental health and mental illness in Canada”, said Michael Kirby, Chair of the Commission.

CAMIMH has now developed a national framework aimed at improving the mental health literacy of Canadians and has begun to forge partnerships at the national, provincial and regional

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levels focusing on priorities involving children and youth, First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples, and frontline medical/social/emergency workers in its initial efforts.

In the fall, CAMIMH coordinates Mental Illness Awareness Week (MIAW) in cooperation with its member organizations and many other supporters across Canada. This annual national public education campaign was designed to help open the eyes of Canadians to the reality of mental illness. It also acknowledges public figures who champion the issue, and profiles Canadians living with mental illness. This year Mental Illness Awareness Week will run from October 5-11.

“It is our hope that through campaigns like Mental Illness Awareness Week and Mental Health Week in Canada, CAMIMH can help spread the message that good mental health is possible for all Canadians, including those living with mental illness, and the hope for recovery must never be dismissed,” said Ms. McKnight.

About the Canadian Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health

Established in 1998, CAMIMH is the national voice for action on mental illness and mental health. It is an alliance of 19 national organizations whose activities span the broad continuum of mental health. They represent: consumers and their families; health care and social service providers; professional associations; and community and research organizations. Together, they constitute a vibrant network of national, provincial and community-based organizations dedicated to serving the mental health needs of the people of Canada. CAMIMH's mission is to promote and facilitate the development, adoption, and implementation of a national action plan on mental illness and mental health and to place these issues on the national health and social policy agendas.

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