

Mental Health Support Network of Canada

Members

Canadian Association
of Occupational
Therapists

Canadian Association
of Social Workers

Canadian Healthcare
Association

Canadian Medical
Association

Canadian Mental
Health Association

Canadian Nurses
Association

Canadian Paediatric
Society

Canadian Pharmacists
Association

Canadian Psychiatric
Association

Canadian
Psychological
Association

Canadian Public
Health Association

Canadian Red Cross

College of Family
Physicians of Canada

January 19, 2007

The Right Honourable Stephen Harper
Prime Minister of Canada
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Dear Prime Minister,

I am writing to you on behalf of the Mental Health Support Network of Canada (MHSNC), a network made up of organizations whose members provide on-the-ground services to promote health, prevent illness and injury, diagnose and treat Canadians, and manage chronic illness and disability.

We read with interest the Canadian Pandemic Influenza Plan for the Health Sector released in late December, 2006. We would like to congratulate you and your government on the continued attention to the need to anticipate, prepare for and effectively manage infectious disease outbreaks and other emergencies. Procedures and guidelines such as those described in the Plan are vital to mitigating the deadly consequences of an influenza pandemic, a recurrence of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) or other public health emergencies.

Recent natural disasters, terrorist events and infectious outbreaks brought home the devastating psychological impact emergencies can have on those both directly and indirectly affected. The psychological impact of tragic events such as the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack, SARS and Hurricane Katrina continues to affect our society today. When it comes to emergency preparedness and response, it's clear that governments need to give more attention to the psychological health needs of those affected.

The final report of the *Commission to Investigate the Introduction and Spread of SARS in Ontario*, which was released on January 9, 2007, reinforces this point. The report eloquently outlines the

psychological and mental health issues faced by the community, patients, health care providers and their families, during and after the SARS crisis.

Unfortunately the lessons learned about the psychological impact of disasters have not been adequately addressed in the current Pandemic Influenza Plan. We strongly recommend that any and all emergency preparedness and response initiatives recognize and better incorporate the psychological, mental health and social dimensions of these tragic events. Research and experience clearly demonstrate the need for this type of planning and intervention.

The MHSNC would welcome the opportunity to work with your government and officials on developing an Annex to the Canadian Pandemic Influenza Plan for the Health Sector that will address psychological, mental health and social factors.

If you have any questions regarding our concerns and proposal please do not hesitate to contact me at jservice@cpa.ca or (613) 237-2144 ext 322.

Sincerely,



John Service, Ph.D.
Executive Director
Canadian Psychological Association
141 Laurier Avenue West, Suite 702
Ottawa, ON K1P 5J3

cc: The Honourable Tony Clement, Minister of Health
The Honourable Stockwell Day, Minister of Public Safety
Provincial and Territorial Ministers of Health