



Canada's Mental Health: The Right Service Where and When Canadians Need it

July 2011. The Canadian Psychological Association (CPA) applauds events, such as the production *Next to Normal*, that raise awareness about psychological issues and disorders among the Canadian public. One of the most powerful ways to reduce the stigma of mental disorders is to share information about what they are, what kinds of services and supports can be of help and about how to seek services.

Mental health problems and disorders do not discriminate. One in five Canadian adults will experience depression and/or anxiety in a given year¹ and, in the majority, mental health problems begin in childhood or adolescence.² According to the World Health Organization, by 2020, depression will be the second leading cause of disability adjusted life years for all ages and both sexes (second only to heart disease)³. Mental disorders, particularly when untreated or under treated, take a toll on individuals, families and society. The cost to Canadian economy due to mental disorders in the workplace is billions of dollars annually⁴.

“For the most common of mental disorders, anxiety and depression, psychological therapies such as cognitive behavioural therapy are treatments of choice.” says Dr. David Dozois, President of the CPA. He adds that “Despite the fact that there are effective services and supports for mental disorders, less than one-third of people who need them actually receive them⁵.”

Unfortunately, not all Canadians who need these services have access to them – either because waitlists for publicly funded service are long or the needed service is not funded, or is insufficiently funded, by public and private health insurance plans. A compelling example is the wait lists that exist in many of the country's public schools for psychoeducational assessments or psychological interventions because of the decreasing number of resource professionals, like psychologists, employed by the country's school boards. Early intervention for learning disabilities, autism and other mental health conditions is extremely important to management and recovery and to the impact the condition will have on a child's life.

There are important barriers to accessing services from psychologists in particular. Dr. Karen Cohen, Chief Executive Officer of the CPA explains “We have public *medical* insurance plans in Canada rather than public *health* insurance plans. We provide public access to particular services by designated providers. We do not necessarily provide public access to the needed service by the provider trained to deliver it.” Other countries have increasingly recognized this need. As of 2006, public health insurance in Australia covers services provided by registered

¹ http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/publicat/miic-mmac/chap_1-eng.php

² http://www.camh.net/News_events/Key_CAMH_facts_for_media/addictionmentalhealthstatistics.html

³ http://www.who.int/mental_health/management/depression/definition/en/

⁴ http://www.camh.net/News_events/Key_CAMH_facts_for_media/addictionmentalhealthstatistics.html

⁵ http://www.camh.net/News_events/Key_CAMH_facts_for_media/addictionmentalhealthstatistics.html



psychologists. The UK has undertaken to spend £170 million on improving access to psychological therapies by 2011.

“In addressing Canada’s mental health needs, it is not only essential to make it acceptable to ask for help, we must provide people with access to the help they need.” concludes Dr. Dozois. Public discussion and information sharing can go a long way to dispelling stigma and discrimination when it comes to mental disorders. Making needed and effective services accessible is equally critical. Canadians who experience mental health problems deserve effective mental health service where and when they need it. The Canadian Psychological Association and Canada’s psychologists are committed to making this so.

For information about mental health problems and conditions, visit CPA’s fact sheets at <http://www.cpa.ca/public/yourhealthpsychologyworksheets/>

For information about deciding whether and how to consult a psychologist and what to expect, visit <http://www.cpa.ca/public/>

Links to provincial and territorial associations of psychology that often maintain referrals services to care can be found at <http://www.cpa.ca/public/provincialandterritorialassociations/>

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