

October 19, 2009

The Honourable Leona Aglukkaq, P.C., M.P.
Health Canada
Brooke Claxton Building, Tunney's Pasture
Postal Locator: 0906C
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0K9

Dear Minister Aglukkaq:

We are writing on behalf of Canada's Mental Health Table (MHT). As you may be aware, the MHT is a recently formed alliance of several of Canada's national associations of regulated health care providers with interest and activity in the mental health of the patients with whom they work and to whom they provide service.

The mandate of the MHT includes sharing and contributing to the development of knowledge about mental health promotion and collaborative mental health care delivery among participating associations and other stakeholders/partners in mental health (e.g. consumers and families, communities, institutions, government).

Current members of the MHT include:

Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists
Canadian Association of Social Workers
Canadian Association of Speech Language Pathologists and Audiologists
Canadian Medical Association
Canadian Federation of Mental Health Nurses
Canadian Nurses Association
Canadian Pharmacists Association
Canadian Physiotherapy Association
Canadian Psychiatric Association
Canadian Psychological Association
College of Family Physicians of Canada
Registered Psychiatric Nurses of Canada

We understand that the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) is at present undertaking a review of its Pan Canadian Healthy Living Strategy (PCHLS). We further understand that there is general acknowledgement that the current PCHLS falls short in its attention to mental health and incorporation of psychological factors into strategies to promote healthy living for Canadians.

The need for Canada and its jurisdictions to attend to mental health and mental health promotion has been recognized by many of our associations dating back to the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology Study on the State of the Health Care System in Canada in 2002.

As members of the MHT, we would like to underscore our support for PHAC's work to develop a healthy living strategy for Canada. We would like to also underscore the World Health Organization's view that there is no health without mental health (<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs220/en/>) and that the success of strategies in support of healthy living depend, in no small measure, on their attention to mental health and the role of psychological factors in health.

The determinants of the chronic health conditions facing Canadians include ones related to mental functioning (e.g. the relationship among depression, stress and heart disease) as are some of the factors that determine how well one prevents or manages a health condition (e.g. weight loss or increasing physical activity requires behaviour change). Mental health problems themselves can become significant and chronic health conditions affecting one in five Canadians over the course of a lifetime. Further, the chronic health conditions that are of increasing concern to PHAC are particularly concomitant with mental disorders. This concomitance is related to lifestyle factors prevalent in those with mental disorders (e.g. smoking, poor eating habits, lack of exercise), side effects of psychotropic medications, and sometimes to poor healthcare and follow up.

We would like to urge PHAC to incorporate a comprehensive mental health focus into its PCHLS. This includes incorporating the critical role that psychological, social and economic factors play in the prevention or management of health and illness, in addition to addressing distinct health living issues for persons with mental health disorders. The challenge is not just creating the opportunities for people to exercise more or make better food choices but in supporting people to make the psychological and behavioural changes necessary to take advantage of those opportunities and, ultimately, to make and sustain lifestyle changes

We are glad to be of assistance to PHAC in its PCHLS efforts at any time and can be reached via Dr. Cohen, one of the co-chairs of the Mental Health Table.

Yours sincerely,

K.R. Cohen Ph.D., C. Psych.
Executive Director
Canadian Psychological Association
Co-Chair, Mental Health Table for Regulated Health Professions

c.c. Dr. David Butler-Jones, Chief Public Health Officer, Public Health Agency of Canada