

For Immediate Release

Ottawa, ON, April 14, 2014/CNW/

Mental Health Community Committed to Repairing Damage Caused by Bill C-14, *Not Criminally Responsible Reform Act*

Eleven national health organizations opposed to the *Not Criminally Responsible Reform Act* expressed their disappointment in the legislative process that has allowed a bill to pass that could jeopardize public safety, limit recovery for victims, and cause harm to people living with a mental illness.

In February 2013, the Conservative Government introduced *the Not Criminally Responsible Reform Act* that was intended to enhance victims' rights, ensure public safety is the paramount concern, and create a new "high risk accused" category within the Not Criminally Responsible (NCR) regime. While enhancing victims' rights and protecting the public is very important to Canada's mental health community, the Bill does neither.

"The unnecessary and highly stigmatizing 'high risk accused' category is based on no evidence and encourages Canadians to be afraid of people living with a mental illness", said Dr. Sandy Simpson, Chief of Forensic Psychiatry at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. "While previous crimes may be an indicator of future crimes in the criminal system, this is not the case for people found NCR. This unjust category may result in people with serious mental illness, who are in fact NCR, going to jail instead of a health facility where their needs, and society's, would be better served".

The mental health community was not consulted during the creation of the Bill. Past and present Justice Ministers Nicholson and MacKay both declined to meet with the organizations in person. Highly respected research that supported concerns around the Bill was dismissed. The Conservative government argued the Bill would not stigmatize people living with a mental illness, however, the mental health organizations that represent millions of people in Canada living with a mental illness, and their families, wholeheartedly disagree.

"Mental illness can be complex and difficult to understand for many Canadians. Leaders and decision-makers have a responsibility to help educate and advance our society rather than perpetuate fear from that lack of understanding. Although this Bill falls far short of meeting its intended goals and the needs of Canadians, the mental health community is fully dedicated to working with government and other stakeholders to address the impact of the Bill's changes. To do so, we need to be guided by evidence of what works for victims, persons found NCR and the Canadian public." said Chris Summerville, CEO of the Schizophrenia Society of Canada.

Victims themselves have also indicated their support in repairing the damage. "As a mother of a 2 ½ year-old son who was brutally murdered by a person found NCR, I find Bill C-14 extremely offensive" said psychologist, Dr. Lori Triano-Antidormi. "Labeling particular individuals with a mental illness as high risk will not assist victims in their healing and recovery. Victims deserve better".

Members of the National Health Coalition Opposed to the *Not Criminally Responsible Reform Act*:

Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention
Canadian Association of Social Workers
Canadian Mental Health Association
Canadian Nurses Association
Canadian Psychological Association
Centre for Addiction and Mental Health
Mood Disorders Society of Canada
National Network for Mental Health
Peer Development Initiative
Psychosocial Rehabilitation Canada
Schizophrenia Society of Canada

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