Barriers to health services

BY K.R. COHEN, JOHN SERVICE, OTTAWA CITIZEN  FEBRUARY 1, 2012


Lee Greenberg’s article makes a good point when it states that the "public system covers medically necessary hospital and physician services and little else."

Across Canada, we do indeed have public "medical" and not "health" insurance. We pay designated health-care providers (i.e. physicians) to deliver specific services. Though physicians are central to health care, there are 30 or more regulated health-care professions in Canada (i.e. occupational therapists and psychologists) who deliver health care to Canadians. Unless they are employed by the public system (i.e. hospitals, schools), services of non-physician providers are not generally funded by public health insurance plans.

As Greenberg notes, psychological services are not included on the list of services covered by the Ontario public health insurance plan.

This is despite the fact that one in five Canadians will experience a mental-health problem in a given year and that mental disorders are a leading cause of disability in Canada. Some of the most effective treatments for common mental disorders such as depression and anxiety are psychological treatments.

Yet Canadians, in particular those in lower and middle-income levels, face significant barriers when it comes to accessing psychological services due to their cost. Given that the estimated burden of mental disorders to the Canadian economy is tens of billions per year, Canada is paying for mental disorders even when not funding treatments for them.

When it comes to mental health, Canada needs to do a better job making effective services available to the people who need them.

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