Canadians Need Better Access to Psychological Services

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Today in honour of Psychology Month, the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA), the Mood Disorders Society of Canada (MDSC) and the Canadian Psychological Association (CPA) joined forces to highlight the need to enhance access to mental health services in Canada.

Mental disorders are a leading cause of disability in Canada and represent a significant burden on the economy. It is estimated to cost the Canadian economy $51-billion annually. Psychologists are the largest group of regulated and specialized mental health care providers in Canada. 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.

"The services of psychologists are not funded by provincial health insurance plans which make them inaccessible to Canadians with modest incomes or no insurance" said Peter Coleridge, National Chief Executive Officer, of the CMHA. This is in spite of the fact that some of the most effective treatments for common mental disorders - depression and anxiety - are psychological ones like cognitive behaviour therapy".

The U.K. has invested 400 million pounds over four years to make psychological therapies more accessible, and Australia has also enhanced access to psychologists through its publicly funded health insurance plans" adds Coleridge. "Canada must do the same."

"It is vitally important that we look to the needs of the community when it comes to mental disorders and health promotion and that we respond to those in ways that are effective" said Dave Gallison, Associate National Executive Director of MDSC. "Our research has found that the lack of insured services prevents a majority of individuals with mental illnesses from seeking the support they need."

Next week the Government of Manitoba is hosting a mental health summit with a focus on children and youth. Seventy percent of adults living with a mental disorders experience the causes or onset of their disorders before age 18. Early intervention can make a dramatic difference in the course of a disorder and, ultimately in a person's life.

"Psychological services are proven effective in helping Canadians to manage and overcome psychological problems and disorders," added
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Dr Karen Cohen, Chief Executive Officer of the Canadian Psychological Association, "Canada's private health care insurance plans and publicly funded programs don't do enough to ensure Canadians have equal and adequate access to needed psychological service. Canada's governments and employers must do more to ensure all Canadians - regardless of income - can access the psychological care they need."

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