



**Mood Disorders** Society of Canada

La Société Pour **Les Troubles de L'Humeur** du Canada

**Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) Affects Us All**

**Helping Canadians Affected by Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)  
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## Executive Summary and Introduction

*“Mental illness has a significant impact on all our lives. It visits us in our homes, our workplaces and on the streets of our communities. It costs our economy billions and our society untold grief. In short, it’s a major national public health problem.”*

The Right Honourable Stephen Harper, August 31, 2007

Mental illness is among the most common and debilitating health issues, and it is estimated that ten percent of Canadians will experience major depression within their lifetime. The stigma and discrimination associated with mental illness are still profound and harmful barriers to treatment today.

Mood Disorders Society of Canada (MDSC) is a national, not-for-profit, consumer-driven, voluntary health charity committed to ensuring that the voices of consumers, family members and caregivers are heard on issues relating to mental health and mental illness; and in particular with regard to depression, bipolar illness and other associated mood disorders.

MDSC was formally launched and incorporated in 2001 with the overall objective to provide people with mood disorders with a strong, cohesive voice at the national level to improve access to treatment, inform research, shape program development and government policies to improve the quality of life for people affected by mood disorders.

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a major mental health problem in Canada. As a mental illness, the impact of PTSD cuts across all segments of society – from serving members of Canada’s Armed Forces, our Veterans, members of Police Services across Canada and other Emergency and First Responders, to persons who are involved in serious accidents, who suffer serious sports injuries such as concussions, and those who are survivors of various forms of abuse and bullying. In every case, families, caregivers, healthcare providers, support networks and Canada’s economy are impacted by PTSD. And in almost every case, depression, the most common mental illness, is a co-morbid or associated condition.

MDSC’s submission aligns clearly with the Government of Canada’s priority that calls for *“Supporting families and helping vulnerable Canadians by focusing on health, education and training”*.

**As a proven and trusted partner to the Government of Canada when it comes to helping Canadians who suffer from mental illness, MDSC recommends that the 2015 Federal budget include funding in the amount of 10 million dollars directed to MDSC for the purpose of reducing the burden and impact of PTSD on those afflicted, their family and caregivers, and the overall healthcare system.**

These funds would be directed toward several initiatives including:

1. The development of a national data bank on PTSD that will help advance treatment and training by ensuring statistics, information and research is up to date and shared across the mental health community.
2. The enhancement of PTSD education for family physicians, other healthcare providers, community mental health organizations and family and caregivers.
3. To significantly enhance the availability of peer and other psychosocial supports, and to the development of toolkits and other materials for family physicians and families.
4. Further research to better understand PTSD and its most frequent co-morbid condition, depression, and to develop best practices in the early intervention for the diagnosis and treatment of PTSD.

### **MDSC's PTSD Leadership**

Since partnering with the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) to produce the Government of Canada's first report on mental illness in 2002, as well as a second report in 2006, MDSC has been at the forefront of developing research materials that have changed the way mental health issues are dealt with in society and treated in the health care system. Other MDSC accomplishments, in tandem with key stakeholders, include:

- Ongoing suicide prevention efforts with key partners;
- The development of leading education materials on mental health issues (particularly related to stigma) which are used extensively by the Canadian Medical Association (CMA), doctors, nurses and other health care providers across Canada;
- Developed a "champions network" of prominent Canadians, politicians and other influential voices for raising awareness of mental health issues;
- Bridges built and solid inroads made with Canada's First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities;
- The establishment of a research centres (CDRIN Depression Hubs) network in partnership with the Mental Health Commission, the University of Ottawa Institute of Mental Health Research and educational institutions across Canada;
- The launch of a PTSD-Continuing Medical Education Course (CME), designed to educate Canada's 77,000 family physicians about PTSD, including diagnosis and treatment. This CME has been successfully completed and evaluated and is now available to Canada's family physicians and is accredited by the College of Family Physicians of Canada and the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada;
- MDSC brought together a round-table of highly influential individuals including those living with PTSD, family members and caregivers, members of Parliament, and PTSD experts and produced a report on PTSD that continues to inform issues surrounding PTSD today; and
- Stakeholder partnerships across the mental health community in Canada and in the United States and Europe.
- MDSC is active in providing peer support training led by former police officers who know and who have suffered from PTSD.

- Stigma is a major barrier to those living with PTSD when trying to access mental health services. In addition to MDSC's CME on stigma developed in partnership with the Mental Health Commission of Canada, MDSC's national anti stigma campaign, the Elephant in the Room, has successfully been implemented in hundreds of schools, workplaces and public institutions as well as in Great Britain and Ireland.
- MDSC developed and manages the national Defeat Depression Campaign, in collaboration with organizations and community mental health agencies across Canada.

Simply put our network and experiences to date make MDSC the ideal organization to lead on a project that affects Canadians from all walks of life. MDSC has the knowledge and know-how to get results and help alleviate the burden that PTSD, (as well as depression and suicide), places on Canadians from coast-to-coast-to-coast.

### **Benefits to All Canadians**

PTSD affects all Canadian families. While some statistics are kept (for example by the Department of National Defense and Veterans Affairs Canada), there is no general data bank on the subject. Given these issues extend to Canadians of all walks of life and their families – an opportunity exists to enhance our knowledge of these issues so that we can better help those affected by PTSD.

Because there are no national statistics, media attention is most often focused on the PTSD issues of our Armed Forces and Veterans and fail to recognize that the incidence of PTSD within the Armed Forces does not appear to be significantly higher than the incidences in the general population. We know that police forces across Canada, first responders and First Nations communities all are impacted by PTSD. We also know that PTSD afflicts Canadians who are involved in many other types of traumatic events,

It is well known that the earlier the intervention the greater likelihood of successful diagnosis and treatment with the least impact on the healthcare system and the economy in general.

Furthermore, suicide is a significant issue in Canada. Earlier diagnosis and treatment of PTSD would significantly reduce the rates of suicide in Canada.

A better understanding by the Canadian public of PTSD and in particular of the efforts of DND, VAC and Aboriginal Affairs to deal with these problems would help ensure Canadians get the treatment they need when they need it. In short, better data, easier access to that data and strengthening training and treatment options would be of enormous benefit to Canadians, the overall health care system and the economy in general.

## **A Pan-Canadian Partnership to Help People Affected by PTSD**

One key feature that has driven MDSC's leadership on issues related to PTSD has been the strong network of stakeholders that have been brought to the table to continue to enhance the training and treatment options available to Canadians affected by PTSD. Given these issues affect Canadians from all walks of life, such a pan-Canadian partnership is the best way to ensure progress continues to be made. As MDSC continues to work with key stakeholders, it is important to recognize that all partners would benefit from continued Government of Canada support. Indeed, we would show clearly that we must work collaboratively if we are to continue to make progress. These government and non-government partners are numerous and include:

- The Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC)
- The Canadian Medical Association (CMA)
- Canadian Nurses Association (CNA)
- The Canadian Depression Research & Intervention Network (CDRIN)
- Department of National Defence (DND)
- Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC)
- Health Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada
- College of Family Physicians of Canada;
- The Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada;
- The Canadian Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health (CAMIMH)
- Provincial, regional and local mental health organizations and service providers

### **Conclusion**

As Prime Minister Harper has stated, mental health issues are a major public health problem, with real costs to our healthcare system and economy, not to mention the costs borne by those directly affected by them. Canadian leadership in dealing with mental health issues has been noted around the world and efforts across the spectrum of mental health issues have been given the political support that has long been needed.

While we have come a long way, there is still more that needs to be done, particularly in the areas of suicide prevention, the diagnosis and treatment of depression and the diagnosis and treatment of PTSD.

Media have tended to focus on specific segments of the population – Veterans, our Emergency First-Responders and others – while neglecting the suffering of everyday Canadians who are our family, neighbours, friends and co-workers.

A renewed commitment in Budget 2015 to all Canadians suffering from PTSD would build on Canada's leadership to date and ensure that progress continues to be made when it comes to treating those affected and training family members and caregivers as well as those who we rely on in our healthcare system to help our loved ones get better.

The benefits to the healthcare system and our economy are clear. As the government continues to position Canada for long-term success, it must also recognize and work with its partners in helping alleviate social issues that impede our economic prosperity. Mental health issues – PTSD, depression and suicide in particular – are three areas that must continue to receive attention and support as public policy is developed.

A commitment to working with the mental health stakeholder community to deal with these issues by accepting the recommendations contained in this pre-budget submission would go a long way to ensuring that the Government of Canada's leadership in these vital areas is recognized.

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