



Mental Health
Commission
of Canada

Commission de
la santé mentale
du Canada

**Briefing note to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance
Ms. Jennifer Vornbrock
Mental Health Commission of Canada
October 7, 2014**

Summary

The Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) ushered in a new era for Canadians, heightening awareness of mental illness and introducing world-renowned research and best practices. The MHCC is ready to take up a new mandate of 10 years (2015-2025) within its current funding structure. It is not essential that new funds be allocated to the MHCC until the 2017-2018 fiscal year. What is important is that our vast network of stakeholders know that our work will be able to continue.

A new mandate will continue our vital work, which in partnership with groups across Canada, is improving our mental health care. We believe that 10 more years will allow us to fully realize a comprehensive renovation of our mental health system and continue to position Canada as an innovative global leader in mental health.

The Case for Investment

The case for investment in mental health is well-founded¹:

- One in five Canadians is living with a mental illness.
- Mental health problems already cost the Canadian economy an estimated \$50 billion each year.
- By 2041, the annual cost of mental health problems will reach \$307 billion each year.
- It is estimated that for every 10% of people who recover from mental illness, we could save \$4 billion per year.

It is because of these significant needs that the MHCC has judiciously leveraged the government's investment dollar-for-dollar, through partnerships that provided funding, resources, and expertise in-kind. To demonstrate the strong impacts of the Housing First approach, researchers have donated their time and skills to analyze data from the *At Home/Chez Soi* participatory research project and disseminate the findings. The development of the *National Standard for Psychological Health and Safety* was funded by contributions from

¹ Making the Case for Investing in Mental Health in Canada, Mental Health Commission of Canada. 2011-2013
http://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/English/system/files/private/document/Investing_in_Mental_Health_FINAL_Version_ENG.pdf

the Government of Canada, the Great West Life Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace, and Bell Canada. Numerous experts – practitioners, policy makers, and persons with lived experience and their families, have dedicated their time and skills to create best practice guidelines for caregivers, seniors, and children and youth.

The MHCC also works with a number of businesses in Canada to help them prioritize mental health. Most notably, the MHCC has worked closely with Bell Canada, now a corporate champion for mental health. Our partnership has spurred such anti-stigma initiatives like the *Let's Talk* campaign, Clara's Big Ride, and Bell's uptake of the *National Standard on Psychological Health in the Workplace*.

“Bell has embraced the Standard as part of our commitment to best practices in workplace mental health, a key pillar of the Bell Let's Talk initiative. We look forward to participating in the [MHCC's] research project, sharing our own experiences and results with workplace mental health to help other companies understand the value of implementing the Standard within their own organizations.”

- George Cope, President and CEO of Bell Canada Enterprises.

The MHCC's original mandate has yielded significant results. We developed the first *Mental Health Strategy for Canada*, drawing on best practices, the experiences of thousands of Canadians, and the advice of all governments. The MHCC has also trained over 100,000 Canadians to respond to mental health crises through the *Mental Health First Aid Canada* course. The *At Home/Chez Soi* participatory research project showed that through the Housing First model, for every \$10 invested in housing a high needs participant, there was an average reduction of \$21.72 in avoided service costs. We launched the world's first *National Standard on Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace*, which has been downloaded over 20,000 times, and is being implemented by public and private sector employers across Canada. A major MHCC research project is currently measuring the outcomes of 42 workplaces now using the *Standard* so that other employers can learn from their experience.

The MHCC has demonstrated there is not just a social case for investing in mental health, but a strong economic case as well. In contrast to the costs, a strategic investment of \$250 million will help curtail ballooning health care budgets and overall economic gains. We cannot afford to stop our work now.

The Next 10 years

We continue to transform the *Mental Health Strategy of Canada's* vast body of recommendations into real solutions for Canadians. Our approach is two-fold:

1. We are currently consulting with national mental health organizations, provincial and territorial leaders, senior government officials, mental health service providers, mental health advocates, and persons with lived experience, to discuss shared priorities.
2. We will capture those priorities in a *Mental Health Action Plan*, with concrete goals and measurable results. Using the *Action Plan*, we will accelerate the implementation of the *Strategy* across Canada.

By following through on the *Action Plan*, we will address the urgent issues facing our mental health system, including: e-mental health, post-traumatic stress disorder, suicide prevention, and mental health supports for children and youth, first responders, new Canadians, and seniors (addressing both mental health and dementia).

Mental Health Leadership

The MHCC is a coordinating agent, aligning and promoting the interests of organizations and agencies across Canada and facilitating collective actions to improve the mental health of Canadians. Many organizations are currently calling for a Mental Health Innovation Fund or a Health Innovation Fund with a mental health component. These funds would address critical issues in mental health, and they would encourage collaborative efforts between mental health stakeholders and relevant government research bodies, such as the Canadian Institutes of Health Research and the Canadian Institute for Health Information.

The MHCC is already a hub of research and development, working closely with both community and national stakeholders and provincial, territorial, and federal agencies. Therefore, an investment in the MHCC will realize the shared interest to fund innovation. Many organizations have already called for the MHCC to be the point organization for these funds.

“The Mental Health Commission’s role and work is of the utmost importance to the advancement of mental health in Canada. There is far too much work in mental health which needs to be accomplished not to have this centralized facilitator of collaborative approach to change.”

- The Canadian Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health (CAMIMH), which represents 18 national health organizations.

The MHCC is unique in what it offers. As a non-member based organization, the MHCC is an arms-length body that brings together the best and brightest in mental health, and facilitates widespread uptake on ideas, policies, and programs. MHCC’s tried and true methodology of identification, evaluation, creating prototypes, and scaling up for provincial/territorial implementation is working; and with health expenditures growing at rapid rates, all resources must be wisely managed.

Focused investments, with concrete goals and measurable outcomes, can help us to reprogram and adjust our approach to mental health care across all sectors and settings to provide better care for those who need it and better value for taxpayers. The MHCC has always budgeted responsibly, and stayed within its allotted budget in each and every year of its mandate. The MHCC is also an efficacious program administrator, managing the *At Home/Chez Soi* research study and spending only 8% on administrative costs². The MHCC has proven it can deliver results faster and for less money.

The MHCC can advise governments on the best programs and resources available to them to address specific mental health issues. We can bring forward broad solutions to issues that may be occurring across various regions, and work with local partners to ensure a coordinated response, where all Canadians receive the tools and supports they need. The MHCC's actions to-date have drawn international acclaim for made-in-Canada practices. Our continued leadership and collaboration will produce positive results for Canadians, and increase our recognition and utility on the international stage.

Better Mental Health and a Stronger Outlook for Canada

Canada cannot afford to lose the momentum established within mental health; Canada needs the MHCC, working together with its partners across Canada, to improve the lives of Canadians living with mental illness. A strong investment in mental health will ensure great returns for all Canadians and will showcase the health and prosperity of our nation, on all levels, to the world.

The Mental Health Commission of Canada was created by the Government of Canada in 2007, arising out of the Senate Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Science, and Technology's landmark study, "Out of the Shadows At Last", which called for a national commission on mental health. The Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) is a catalyst for improving the mental health system and changing the attitudes and behaviours of Canadians around mental health issues. Through its unique mandate from Health Canada, the MHCC brings together leaders and organizations from across the country to accelerate these changes. Each of its initiatives and projects is led by experts who bring a variety of perspectives and experience to the table. The MHCC's staff, Board, Advisory Council and Network of Ambassadors all share the same goal—creating a better system for all Canadians.

² MHCC Financial Reports (various).