

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Federal Leadership Essential to Expand Access to Mental Health and Substance Use Programs and Services

June 17, 2021 (Ottawa) – Well before the COVID-19 pandemic, timely access to accessible and inclusive mental health and substance use health programs and services in Canada has been a longstanding concern, with long wait times being more the rule than the exception.

Knowing that our collective mental health is in decline, there is an essential national leadership role for the federal government, working in close collaboration with the provinces and territories, to ensure Canadians get the mental health and substance use health care they need, when they need it.

In releasing the discussion paper *From Out of the Shadows and Into the Light – Achieving Parity in Access to Care among Mental Health, Substance Use and Physical Health*, the Canadian Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health (CAMIMH) calls on the federal government to introduce and pass a new piece of legislation: a ***Mental Health and Substance Use Health Care For All Parity Act***. The Act would:

1. Enshrine in federal legislation the provision of, and timely access to, inclusive and accessible mental health and substance use programs, services and supports that are valued equally to those provided for physical health problems and conditions.
2. Ensure that a full array of publicly funded and evidence-based mental health and substance use programs, services and supports are available to Canadians on an equitable basis, when and where they need it, and extend beyond traditional hospital and physician settings (as set out in the *Canada Health Act*).
3. Recognize the fundamental importance of investing in health promotion, prevention and education, and the social determinants of health when it comes to mental health and substance use.
4. Include clear accountabilities and meaningful national system performance indicators.
5. Be linked to an envelope of appropriate and sustainable federal funding to the provinces and territories for mental health and substance use programs, services and supports.

“There is no health without mental health,” said Ms. Ellen Cohen, CAMIMH Co-Chair. “As we begin to emerge from COVID-19, we are concerned that the mental health and substance use health effects will remain for a considerable time. Now, more than ever, we must ensure that we have the public resources and capacity to provide timely access to those who are living with a mental health and/or substance use disorder.”

CAMIMH MEMBERS

Canadian Association of Social Workers

Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association

Canadian Federation of Mental Health Nurses

Canadian Medical Association

Canadian Mental Health Association

Canadian Psychiatric Association

Canadian Psychological Association

Medical Psychotherapy Association of Canada

National Initiative for Eating Disorders

National Network for Mental Health

Schizophrenia Society of Canada

Psychosocial Rehabilitation Canada

The College of Family Physicians Canada

“For too long, mental health and substance use have been neglected by Medicare and this must change,” said Dr. Kim Hollihan, CAMIMH Co-Chair. “A **Mental Health and Substance Use Health Care For All Parity Act** would provide a transparent and accountable legislative framework to improve timely access to care for those in need, and recognize the importance of investing in health promotion, prevention, education and the social determinants of health.”

Now is the time to move mental health and substance use from out of the shadows and into the light to achieve parity with physical health problems and conditions. Our mental health matters!

Given the importance that Canadians place on more effectively integrating publicly funded mental health and substance health programs and services into our health care systems, in the coming months CAMIMH will launch a **Mental Health and Substance Use Health Care For All Parity Pledge** campaign which will encourage all Canadians – including Members of Parliament and Senators – to strongly support our country’s best health and wellbeing.

CAMIMH stands ready to work with all levels of governments, and others, to find innovative and sustainable solutions that keep Canadians mentally as well as physically healthy – our success as a country depends on it.

For more information about CAMIMH, please visit our website at www.CAMIMH.ca.

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About CAMIMH

CAMIMH is a non-profit organization comprised of health care providers as well as organizations which represent individuals with lived experience of mental illness. Established in 1998, CAMIMH is a volunteer run organization that provides mental health education to the public. A fundamental objective of CAMIMH is to engage Canadians in a national conversation about mental illness. By starting this conversation, CAMIMH hopes to reduce the stigma associated with mental illness and provide insight into the services and support available to those living with mental illness.

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