

# TOWARD RECOVERY & WELL-BEING

A Framework for a Mental Health Strategy for Canada

## SUMMARY

Mental Health Commission of Canada

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## Introduction

### MENTAL HEALTH AND MENTAL ILLNESS

- ▶ Mental health is more than the absence of mental illness.
- ▶ People can have varying degrees of mental health, whether or not they have a mental illness.
- ▶ Mental health problems and illnesses are believed to result from a complex interaction among social, economic, psychological and biological or genetic factors.
- ▶ Mental health contributes to our enjoyment of life, to physical health, as well as to our ability to achieve our goals at work, at school and in our relationships.
- ▶ Having good mental health helps to reduce stress, prevent mental health problems and illnesses, and foster recovery.
- ▶ Each year, about one in every five Canadians will experience a diagnosable mental health problem or illness.

### ACHIEVING THE BEST POSSIBLE MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING FOR EVERYONE

- ▶ When it comes to mental health and well-being we are all the same – there is no us and them.
- ▶ Our vision is that: All people in Canada have the opportunity to achieve the best possible mental health and well-being.
- ▶ The mental health system must be centred on meeting people’s needs across the lifespan.
- ▶ The system must also be comprehensive – promoting mental health for people of all ages, supporting those at risk, intervening early, and assisting people to recover.
- ▶ People living with mental health problems and illnesses must be able to participate actively in all aspects of the mental health system.

### THE CONTRIBUTIONS AND NEEDS OF FIRST NATIONS, INUIT AND MÉTIS

- ▶ A mental health strategy for Canada must acknowledge the unique circumstances, rights, and contributions of First Nations, Inuit and Métis in Canada and respond to their needs.
- ▶ An indigenous, holistic understanding of wellness – rooted in culture, the land, family, community and self-determination – can help to transform the mental health system.
- ▶ Despite the devastating impact of colonization and policies such as residential schools, indigenous peoples are developing innovative approaches to healing, such as cultural safety.

### GOALS FOR A MENTAL HEALTH STRATEGY

- ▶ A mental health strategy must be flexible enough to respond to the many and diverse needs of people across the country if it is to be implemented.
- ▶ The seven goals in this framework are interconnected and provide the structure for a strategy that will help guide the transformation of the mental health system.
- ▶ With support and input from people across the country, it will be possible to progress toward achieving all the goals and create a system that supports all people in Canada as they journey toward recovery and well-being.

## Goal One:

People of all ages living with mental health problems and illnesses are actively engaged and supported in their journey of recovery and well-being.

A transformed mental health system fosters hope for a better quality of life and respects the dignity and rights of each person at every stage of life. Building on individual, family, cultural and community strengths, people are empowered and supported to be actively engaged in their own journey of recovery and well-being, and to enjoy a meaningful life in their community while striving to achieve their full potential. As they develop, infants, children and youth are assisted to become resilient and to attain the best mental health possible. Older adults are supported to address additional needs associated with aging. People living with mental health problems and illnesses, service providers, family caregivers, peers, and others, are partners in the healing journey.

### BACKGROUND

- ▶ People who experience mental health problems and illnesses are too often led to believe that they will never improve their quality of life or be able to function in society.
- ▶ Recovery principles have been adopted by people living with mental health problems and illnesses as an approach that focuses on their strengths and capacities.
- ▶ A recovery orientation is being used to transform mental health systems around the world.
- ▶ ‘Recovery’ does not necessarily mean ‘cure’; rather, it focuses on people recovering a meaningful life in their community while striving to achieve their full potential.

### KEY PRINCIPLES

- ▶ Underlying recovery principles – including hope, choice, responsibility, dignity and respect – apply to everyone but must be adapted to changing realities across the lifespan.
- ▶ Each person’s journey of recovery and well-being is necessarily different, and will build on individual, family, cultural and community strengths.
- ▶ The goal for infants, children and youth is to attain the best possible mental health as they develop, and the goal for older adults is to attain the best possible quality of life with dignity.

### IN A TRANSFORMED MENTAL HEALTH SYSTEM:

- ▶ People are able to choose among programs, treatments, services and supports to achieve the best possible health, social functioning and overall quality of life.
- ▶ Services and supports are adapted to people’s needs across the lifespan, and oriented to helping people lead a meaningful life in their community.
- ▶ There is a genuine partnership between people living with mental health problems and illnesses, their families, and those working to support their recovery and well-being.
- ▶ People living with mental health problems and illnesses, and their families, are actively involved in the all aspects of the mental health system.

## Goal Two:

Mental health is promoted, and mental health problems and illnesses are prevented wherever possible.

A transformed mental health system attends to the complex interaction of economic, social, psychological and biological or genetic factors that is known to determine mental health and mental illness across the lifespan. The public, private and voluntary sectors work collaboratively to promote factors that strengthen mental health – such as adequate housing, vibrant communities, nurturing relationships, and resilience – and to reduce, wherever possible, those factors that increase the risk of developing mental health problems and illnesses – such as poverty, abuse, and social isolation. Efforts are directed at the population as a whole, at people and communities at risk, at those with emerging problems, and at people living with mental health problems and illnesses. Locations such as schools, workplaces, and long-term care facilities foster environments that promote the best possible mental health.

### BACKGROUND

- ▶ Good mental health is associated with better physical health, reduced crime, improved educational attainment, increased economic participation, and rich social relationships.
- ▶ Poor mental health has the opposite associations.
- ▶ Protective factors help to maintain good mental health, develop resilience, and reduce the chances of developing mental health problems and illnesses.
- ▶ Risk factors increase the likelihood of developing mental health problems or illnesses and can also worsen existing conditions.
- ▶ The opportunity to prevent mental health problems and illnesses appears to be greatest among children and youth.

### KEY PRINCIPLES

- ▶ It is impossible to predict with any certainty who will experience the symptoms of a mental health problem or illness.
- ▶ Mental health promotion and mental illness prevention must be integrated throughout mental health policy and practice, as well as into public health and social policy more broadly.
- ▶ Addressing complex social determinants of health such as housing and employment can create better conditions for people to flourish and help to prevent mental health problems and illnesses.
- ▶ A mental health strategy can encourage collaborative action by the public, private and voluntary sectors.

### IN A TRANSFORMED MENTAL HEALTH SYSTEM:

- ▶ Promotion and prevention initiatives are targeted to the population as a whole, to specific groups and settings, address a combination of known risk and protective factors, and are sustained over a long period of time.
- ▶ Effective approaches are implemented in families, schools and workplaces, as well as being adapted to meet the unique needs of diverse communities and to build upon their strengths.
- ▶ Whole of government approaches help to integrate programs and services across multiple levels and departments of government.
- ▶ Mental health literacy initiatives inform people about the signs and symptoms of mental health problems and illnesses.

### Goal Three:

The mental health system responds to the diverse needs of all people in Canada.

In a transformed mental health system, policies, programs, treatments, services and supports are culturally safe and culturally competent. The system responds to the diverse individual and group needs of – as well as to the disparities – that can arise from First Nations, Inuit or Métis identity; ethno-cultural background, experience of racism, and migration history; stage of life; language spoken; sex, gender, and sexual orientation; geographic location; different abilities; socio-economic status; and spiritual or religious beliefs.

#### BACKGROUND

- ▶ Many population groups in Canada continue to experience poorer mental health outcomes than the population as a whole; in some cases, these disparities are acute.
- ▶ Culture and language influence how mental health is understood; misunderstandings can lead to inappropriate diagnosis and treatment.
- ▶ Significant barriers remain that keep people from finding services that feel safe and are effective, or from seeking help in the first place.
- ▶ Power imbalances and discrimination can contribute to poorer mental health outcomes, and may reduce access to care for affected groups, as well as the quality of care received.

#### KEY PRINCIPLES

- ▶ Cultural safety and cultural competence are complementary frameworks that encourage service providers to take social, political, linguistic and spiritual realities into account.

- ▶ People are multi-faceted and any given person can be expected to have needs that arise from a variety of sources.
- ▶ Efforts to address diverse needs must avoid stereotyping and always respect the law – practices that cause harm to people cannot be tolerated.
- ▶ Dialogue on cultural safety must respect the values of indigenous peoples and be mindful of the context surrounding the sharing of knowledge.

#### IN A TRANSFORMED MENTAL HEALTH SYSTEM:

- ▶ Service providers recognize each person's reality and knowledge as valid and valuable, reflect critically upon their own cultural values, and take historical and political contexts into account.
- ▶ Issues of power and discrimination are addressed, as are structural barriers that relate to housing, income, education, and access to services.
- ▶ There is improved access to information and services in English, French, and multiple languages, including interpretation services.
- ▶ Accreditation bodies and provider organizations adopt standards that require culturally-safe and culturally-competent practice.
- ▶ People from diverse backgrounds are better represented in the mental health workforce.
- ▶ The roles of natural community supports, traditional healers, elders, practitioners of Eastern medicine, and religious or spiritual leaders are recognized and respected.

## Goal Four:

The role of families in promoting well-being and providing care is recognized, and their needs are supported.

The unique role of families – whether they are made up of relatives or drawn from a person’s broader circle of support – in promoting well-being, providing care and fostering recovery across the lifespan is recognized, as are the needs of families themselves. Families are engaged and helped through education and programs such as parenting and sibling support, financial assistance, peer support and respite care. Wherever possible, families become partners in the care and treatment of their loved ones and are integrated into decision-making in a way that respects consent and privacy.

### BACKGROUND

- ▶ Many factors related to family life can promote mental health, assist in detecting the onset of mental health problems and illnesses, and foster recovery and well-being.
- ▶ Families are typically the primary support for people living with mental health problems and illnesses, but have traditionally been marginalized by the mental health system.
- ▶ Families can also be a poor source of support, particularly when hampered by lack of information, stigma, or difficult life circumstances.
- ▶ Failure to support families undermines mental health across the population, increases the costs of care and worsens health and social outcomes.

### KEY PRINCIPLES

- ▶ It is important to begin with the assumption that families can play a potentially positive role in recovery and well-being.
- ▶ Families can be made up of relatives or be drawn from a person’s broader circle of support.
- ▶ Wherever possible, people living with mental health problems and illnesses need to choose who will play the role of “family,” and how much family support is required.
- ▶ At times, a mental health problem or illness may compromise a person’s ability to make appropriate judgments and decisions.
- ▶ A suitable balance must be found between facilitating the family’s ability to provide effective support, and respecting the privacy rights of the person living with the mental illness.

### IN A TRANSFORMED MENTAL HEALTH SYSTEM:

- ▶ Families have access to the information, education, guidance and support they need in order to foster recovery and well-being, and to respond to their own needs.
- ▶ Wherever possible, families are partners in the care and treatment of their loved ones, and are integrated into decision-making in a way that respects consent and privacy.
- ▶ “Family Navigators” and other providers assist families to navigate both the health care system, and the realities associated with mental health problems and illnesses.
- ▶ Programs and supports for families are responsive to the diversity of the Canadian population.

## Goal Five:

People have equitable and timely access to appropriate and effective programs, treatments, services and supports, that are seamlessly integrated around their needs.

People of all ages have timely access to appropriate and effective mental health programs, treatments, services and supports in their community, or as close as possible to where they live or work, regardless of their ability to pay. The mental health system is centred on fostering people's mental health and meeting the full range of people's needs – however complex – in the least restrictive way possible. It is seamlessly integrated within and across the public, private and voluntary sectors, across jurisdictions, and across the lifespan. The pressing needs in under-serviced areas such as the north are addressed.

### BACKGROUND

- ▶ Despite the dedicated efforts of many thousands of people, two out of every three adults and three out of every four children who need help do not get it.
- ▶ The situation is worse in northern, rural, remote and other underserved areas.
- ▶ Public mental health spending is lower in Canada than in most developed countries.
- ▶ Lengthy waiting lists are all too common; too many people with mental health problems end up in homeless shelters and the justice system as a result.

### KEY PRINCIPLES

- ▶ People should have timely and equitable access to the mental health system, without incurring undue financial hardship.
- ▶ No matter where people first seek help, they should be connected to the appropriate part of the system, linked to the rest of the health care system as well as to other needed services.

- ▶ People should be able to choose the mix of programs, treatments, services and supports that allow them to meet their goals.
- ▶ The principle of employing the least intrusive and least restrictive interventions possible should be upheld.
- ▶ Each jurisdiction must be able to adapt the common elements of a transformed mental health system to its own specific set of circumstances.

### IN A TRANSFORMED MENTAL HEALTH SYSTEM:

- ▶ Programs, treatments services, and supports are linked in order to promote people's mental health and meet the full range of people's needs, however complex.
- ▶ Government activity is coordinated through a "whole of government" approach.
- ▶ The existing mental health workforce is expanded and new provider roles are introduced as required.
- ▶ The pressing and distinct needs of northern, remote and rural areas are addressed, through innovative approaches to service delivery and action on housing, education and employment.
- ▶ People living with mental health problems and illnesses, as well as their families, actively participate in the redesign and transformation of the system.

## Goal Six:

Actions are informed by the best evidence based on multiple sources of knowledge, outcomes are measured, and research is advanced.

Mental health policies, programs, treatments, services and supports are informed by the best evidence based on multiple sources of knowledge. They are evaluated on the basis of their contribution to improving the mental health and well-being of people of all ages living in Canada, and the health and social outcomes of people living with mental health problems and illnesses and their families. Funding for the many kinds of research required to enhance our understanding of mental health and mental illness is increased in keeping with the economic and social impact of mental health problems and illnesses, and the translation of this knowledge into policy and practice is accelerated.

### BACKGROUND

- ▶ Research has brought important advances in our understanding of mental health and mental illness, and of effective approaches to promotion, prevention, treatment and care.
- ▶ Overall, Canada does not spend nearly enough on mental health research.
- ▶ Canada lacks an adequate information base to enable it to monitor the mental health status of the population, and to evaluate the effectiveness of the mental health system.
- ▶ There is an unacceptable lag in the translation of new knowledge into practice – estimates suggest that it can take up to 15 years.
- ▶ Diverse sources of knowledge – such as lived experience and traditional or customary knowledge – have not been sufficiently valued.
- ▶ There has been a disproportionate concentration of research on certain topics (e.g. the evaluation of psychiatric medications).

### KEY PRINCIPLES

- ▶ A solid commitment to research and to the development of new knowledge is essential.
- ▶ No single approach to the development of new knowledge can be used in all circumstances – multiple research methods are required and diverse sources of knowledge are needed.
- ▶ While research into the effectiveness of treatments for mental health problems and illnesses will always be important, the scope of research must be expanded.
- ▶ Research practices must respect and protect the rights and freedoms of participants in mental health research.

### IN A TRANSFORMED MENTAL HEALTH SYSTEM:

- ▶ Spending on research is in keeping with the social and economic impact of mental illness and addresses the full range of determinants of mental health and mental illness.
- ▶ Improved data supports the evaluation of the mental health system.
- ▶ People with diverse backgrounds and with lived experience of mental health problems and illnesses are encouraged to participate in and lead research.
- ▶ All stakeholders work together to accelerate the translation of new knowledge into policy and practice.



## Goal Seven:

People living with mental health problems and illnesses are fully included as valued members of society.

Having a mental health problem or illness is no longer a source of shame or stigma for people and their families, and discrimination toward them is eliminated. People of all ages living with mental health problems and illnesses are accorded the same respect, rights and entitlements, and have the same opportunities as people dealing with physical illnesses and as other people living in Canada. Mental health policies, programs, treatments, services and supports are funded at a level that is in keeping with the economic and social impact of mental health problems and illnesses.

### BACKGROUND

- ▶ Stigma and discrimination have a significant negative impact on the lives of people of all ages living with mental health problems and illnesses, and seriously impede their ability to participate fully in Canadian society.
- ▶ Stigma refers to negative beliefs and attitudes about mental health problems and illnesses.
- ▶ Discrimination refers to unfair treatment of people living with mental health problems and illnesses.
- ▶ Stigma and discrimination keep mental health issues in the shadows, prevent people from seeking care and lead to poorer quality of care.

### KEY PRINCIPLES

- ▶ People living with mental health problems and illnesses must be accorded the same respect, rights and entitlements, and have the same opportunities, as other people living in Canada.

- ▶ The same progress that has been made in challenging stigma and discrimination related to other health challenges can be accomplished with respect to mental illness.
- ▶ It is important to focus on the positive contributions made by people living with mental health problems and illnesses, as well as on their ability to recover.

### IN A TRANSFORMED MENTAL HEALTH SYSTEM:

- ▶ People living with mental health problems and illnesses have the opportunity to participate as active citizens in all aspects of social life.
- ▶ Mental health programs are funded at a level in keeping with the economic and social impact of mental health problems and illnesses on society.
- ▶ Mental health service providers are recognized for the valuable role they play.
- ▶ All sectors work together to address inequities related to the broad determinants of health.
- ▶ Discrimination under existing social programs or in access to services is directly and forcefully addressed.
- ▶ Anti-stigma strategies target diverse populations and settings, and encourage direct contact with people with lived experience of mental health problems and illness.
- ▶ Changing attitudes and behaviours towards people living with mental health problems and illnesses is a challenge that is taken up daily by all people living in Canada.

## A Call to Action: Building a Social Movement

- ▶ The Commission will work in collaboration with stakeholders to develop concrete recommendations for how to achieve the vision contained in this framework and the seven goals for transforming the mental health system.
- ▶ This framework and future documents that outline how to achieve the vision and goals will comprise the Mental Health Strategy for Canada.
- ▶ The Commission firmly believes that a dynamic, broadly-based social movement is essential to implementing this framework on a scale that will make a real difference in people's lives.
- ▶ Mental health is everyone's business. Many of the conditions that will foster recovery will also contribute to enhancing everyone's well-being – in our schools, workplaces, and homes.
- ▶ Every one of us – especially those directly involved in the mental health system – will need to contribute.
- ▶ The Commission applauds the tremendous efforts of mental health organizations to bring mental health issues into the public eye.
- ▶ There is much to be learned from the success of other illness-specific volunteer organizations, such as those concerned with breast cancer, diabetes, heart and stroke, AIDS and so on.
- ▶ Their volunteers raise money, work in health institutions, mount campaigns, openly talk about their experiences, and make sure that the public never loses sight of their concerns.
- ▶ The Commission is calling for the entire mental health community to join together and launch a social movement that can successfully engage all people living in Canada.
- ▶ Mental health issues must be placed high on the day-to-day agendas of governments, policy-makers, businesses, researchers, schools, and communities.
- ▶ The Commission has launched an initiative, Partners for Mental Health, to help build a vast network of people across the country.
- ▶ This social movement will build on existing initiatives, from the grassroots to the national arena, and ensure that the voices of people with lived experience of mental health problems and illnesses are clearly heard.
- ▶ The Commission will work with the recently created charitable organization, Mental Health Partnerships of Canada, to ensure that the necessary fundraising infrastructure is in place.
- ▶ Working together, it will be possible to ensure that all people living in Canada have the opportunity to achieve the best possible mental health and well-being and keep mental health problems and illnesses out of the shadows – forever.