



## BACKGROUND

### **National Guidelines for a Comprehensive Services System to Support Family Caregivers of Adults with Mental Health Problems and Illnesses**

Family caregivers of adults with mental illnesses fulfill a distinct and important role by providing support and advocating for their relatives and contributing to their recovery.

However, the unpredictable nature of many mental illnesses, their longevity, the historical barriers to family involvement within the mental health system, as well as the stigma that is still associated with mental illness, can compromise the health of family caregivers themselves.

Inadequate recognition and support for caregivers may generate significant emotional, physical, financial and social burdens. When these situations create chronic stress for family caregivers they too often become “collateral casualties” of mental illness.

The *National Guidelines for a Comprehensive Service System to Support Family Caregivers of Adults with Mental Health Problems and Illnesses* contain 41 recommendations intended to improve the capacity of caregivers to provide the best possible care to adults with mental illness, while looking after their own wellbeing.

The following key premises are at the foundation of the *Guidelines*:

- Well-supported family caregivers can play a facilitative role in the recovery journey of their ill relative, in the improvement of their quality of life and in their inclusion in all aspects of community life;
- Adequate support can mitigate the stressors often associated with caregiving. The absence of such supports, on the other hand, can lead to negative effects for family caregivers that jeopardize both their capacity to provide care and their own health and wellbeing; and,
- The unpaid care and support provided by family caregivers makes a major contribution to the health and social service system, which would be very costly to replace with paid formal services.

Spearheaded by the Family Caregivers Advisory Committee of the Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC), the *Guidelines* are aligned with the Committee’s mission “to help create conditions that will promote full and meaningful lives for people diagnosed with mental illness and for their families and friends who often serve as their primary support network.”

The *Guidelines* aim to assist planners, policy makers and service providers in planning, implementing and evaluating mental health care services that recognize and address the unique needs of family caregivers.



Mental Health  
Commission  
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To provide the best possible care to an adult living with mental illness while sustaining their own wellbeing, family caregivers usually need:

- To know that their relative is receiving appropriate care and has access to the services and supports that will maximize their potential for quality of life;
- To have their relationships and caregiving roles recognized by mental health service providers and to be meaningfully involved in assessment and treatment planning;
- To receive information and timely support from knowledgeable mental health service providers, including in enhancing their coping skills, so they can effectively provide care to their relative; and,
- To have their personal needs outside of their caregiving role recognized and supported to sustain their own health and emotional wellbeing.

Download the *Guidelines* for free at [www.mentalhealthcommission.ca](http://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca) to learn more about family caregivers and how the Canadian mental health system needs to change to better support their needs.

#### **ABOUT THE MENTAL HEALTH COMMISSION OF CANADA**

The Mental Health Commission of Canada is a catalyst for change. We are collaborating with hundreds of partners to change the attitudes of Canadians toward mental health problems and to improve services and support. Our goal is to help people who live with mental health problems and illnesses lead meaningful and productive lives. Together we spark change.

The Mental Health Commission of Canada is funded by Health Canada.

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