



Mental Health
Commission
of Canada

Commission de
la santé mentale
du Canada

Measuring Structural Stigma in Health Care

Research has consistently identified the health-care system as a significant contributor to stigma for people with lived and living experience (PWLLE) of mental health and/or substance use (MHSU) problems and illnesses. Structural stigma in health care happens when MHSU laws, policies, and systems of care reflect negative biases and beliefs about people with MHSU problems or illnesses and perpetuate the inequitable de-prioritization, devaluation, and ‘othering’ of mental health and substance use health, as compared to physical health, within our healthcare delivery, governance, knowledge building, and training systems.

To evaluate the progress and effectiveness of interventions to reduce structural stigma in healthcare, valid and reliable measures are needed. This requires measurement tools that can assess stigma cultures by understanding the experiences of care from the perspective of PWLLE of MHSU.



To address this need, the MHCC has developed the following tools to measure the scope and magnitude of stigma experienced by people with mental health problems and illnesses and/or substance use:

- **Stigma Cultures in Healthcare Scale (SCHCS):** This scale was designed to capture stigma cultures in any healthcare setting (including family doctor offices, outpatient clinics, emergency departments, and hospitals) where people with a mental health or substance use disorder may seek care. The SCHCS has been psychometrically tested using factor analytic procedures.
- **Structural Stigma in Mental Health Care Scale (SSMHCS):** This scale was specifically designed to provide a cultural barometer of stigma experienced by individuals with a mental or substance use disorder receiving care in a mental health or substance use service setting. The SSMHCS is currently being psychometrically tested using factor analytic procedures.

Piloting the scale in your organization

We invite organizations, both large and small, to join us in our mission to address mental illness and substance use related structural stigma in Canada's health-care system. By piloting the SCHCS or the SSMHCS in your organization, you will identify areas of improvement, monitor progress, and demonstrate your commitment to creating a health system free of stigma for people with MHSU problems and illnesses.

An important first step to addressing structural stigma within healthcare environments is to assess its scope and severity. The SCHCS or the SSMHCS can be the tool(s) that your organization needs to identify stigmatizing encounters reported by PWLLE, as well to target areas in need of a change, and/or to assess and monitor the impact of organizational interventions to reduce structural stigma over time.

If you are interested in implementing this tool or want to learn more about the scales and **how they can help transform your organization's approach to mental health and substance use care**, let's chat! Please contact us at access@mentalhealthcommission.ca.

For more information: [Structural Stigma - Mental Health Commission of Canada](#)



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