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# Mental Illness in Canada

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## SCOPE OF THE ISSUE

- 1 in 5 Canadians will experience a mental illness during their lifetime.
- 3% or nearly 1 million Canadians live with a severe and persistent mental illness.
- 4,000 Canadians per year will end their life through suicide.
- Mental illness is the second leading cause of hospital admission among those 20-44 years of age.
- The economic burden attributed to mental disorders in Canada is significant: moderate estimates suggest \$4.7 billion in direct costs, and an additional \$3.2 billion in indirect costs.
- The World Health Organization estimates that by 2020 depression will be the leading cause of disability in developed countries such as Canada.
- Only one in five children in need of mental health services receives care.
- Families report being stretched to the limit and unable to cope.
- Large numbers of people with mental illness are living on the streets.

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## FEDERAL ACTION

At present, Canada has no national action plan to address the needs of those with mental illness. Federal initiatives to date have been spotty and disconnected. Most recently, the federal/provincial Health Care Renewal Accord has included a commitment to fund home care for cases of acute serious mental illness.

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## COMMUNITY RESPONSE

The Canadian Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health (CAMIMH) is a national coalition of consumer, family, professional and community organizations. CAMIMH is working to achieve a comprehensive national action strategy on mental illness and mental health, and to ensure these issues are prominently featured on federal health and social policy agendas.

In 2000, CAMIMH proposed that a national strategy be based on the following four action steps for which the federal government would provide leadership:

### ***National Public Education and Awareness***

Key components would include:

- support for education activities and campaigns,
- an information clearinghouse,
- regular “snapshots” of the state of mental health policies, programs, and quality of life outcomes for Canadians.

### ***National Policy Framework***

Key components would include:

- establishing criteria to assess the mental health impacts of federal policy and legislative initiatives, and national guidelines for key outcome areas,
- fostering collaboration and partnerships among government levels and departments and with health professionals to enhance service systems and promote mental health,
- providing resources for testing and evaluating innovative models or programs, and
- developing a human resource plan.

### **National Mental Health Research**

Key components would include:

- a national research strategy dedicated to mental illness and mental health, backed by sufficient research funding and a well-supported cadre of trained researchers,
- a commitment to ensuring that research findings are effectively disseminated in order to inform policy and practice,
- a commitment to ensuring consumer/family involvement to keep research grounded and relevant.

### **National Data & Information System**

To support public education, policy development, and identification of research agendas, key components would include:

- collection of mental illness and mental health data,
- a regular reporting program on the results.

### *Additional Elements*

In 2002, original CAMIMH members were joined by a broader group of organizations at a Summit on Mental Illness and Mental Health. Here, further elements of a national action plan were identified and ratified in a consensus statement. These additional key elements include:

- **National Mental Health Goals**
- **Dedicated, Sustained and Adequate Resources**
- **Accountability Mechanisms**

The Summit participants believe a national action plan should be grounded in the following principles:

- Mental illness and mental health issues be considered within the framework of the determinants of health and with recognition of the linkages among mental, neurological and physiological health,
- Mental health issues and mental illness be addressed at a level commensurate with the level of their significant burden on society,
- Interventions be implemented in a manner that is timely, continuous, inter-disciplinary, culturally appropriate, and integrated across the full life cycle and continuum of care.

### **Sources**

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