

Contact:

Rennie Brown
BCMHAS Communications
(604) 992-4119

MEDIA RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

Mental Illness Awareness Week

The risk of developing a mental disorder in your lifetime—including substance use disorders—is over 20 per cent, but mental health issues are not fully recognized and understood by society due to low mental health literacy.

“Mental health literacy is the knowledge and beliefs that help us to recognize, manage and prevent mental health and substance use problems,” said Dr. Connie Coniglio, the Director of Health Literacy for BC Mental Health and Addiction Services (BCMHAS).

Research has demonstrated that mental health promotion and prevention interventions and policies can have a positive impact on mental health itself, as well as on the emotional and economic toll these diseases have on patients, their families, caregivers and society at large.

“With improved mental health literacy, comes the ability for people to recognize issues sooner or even prevent them,” said Coniglio.

During the month of October, BCMHAS is working closely with its community partners to provide a series of educational events to improve understanding about mental health and substance use issues.

Media availability:

- Dr. Connie Coniglio is available Oct. 5-8 for media interviews on this topic and to provide information on public education activities and events taking place in October.

Other resources:

Kelty Resource Centre www.bcmhas.ca/keltyresourcecentre

Provides mental health and substance use information for children, youth, parents and families including resources, practical tips, multilingual information and a listing of current events.

HeretoHelp www.heretohelp.bc.ca

Provides factsheets, brochures, stories, toolkits, multilingual information about mental health and substance use issues and skills in managing anxiety, depression, and mental well being.

More...

Facts about Mental Illness

Who is affected?

- Mental illness indirectly affects all Canadians at some time through a family member, friend or colleague.
- Approximately 20% of Canadians will personally experience a mental illness in their lifetime.
- Mental illness affects people of all ages, educational and income levels, and cultures.
- Approximately 8% of adults will experience major depression at some time in their lives.
- About 1% of Canadians will experience bipolar disorder (or "manic depression").

How common is it?

- Schizophrenia affects 1% of the Canadian population.
- Anxiety disorders affect 5% of the household population, causing mild to severe impairment.
- Suicide accounts for 24% of all deaths among 15-24 year olds and 16% among 25-44 year olds.
- Suicide is one of the leading causes of death in both men and women from adolescence to middle age.
- The mortality rate due to suicide among men is four times the rate among women.

What causes it?

- A complex interplay of genetic, biological, personality and environmental factors causes mental illnesses.
- Almost one half (49%) of those who feel they have suffered from depression or anxiety have never gone to see a doctor about this problem.
- Stigma or discrimination attached to mental illnesses presents a serious barrier, not only to diagnosis and treatment but also to acceptance in the community.
- Mental illnesses can be treated effectively.

What is the economic cost?

- The economic cost of mental illnesses in Canada for the health care system was estimated to be at least \$7.9 billion in 1998 - \$4.7 billion in care, and \$3.2 billion in disability and early death.
- An additional \$6.3 billion was spent on uninsured mental health services and time off work for depression and distress that was not treated by the health care system.
- In 1999, 3.8% of all admissions in general hospitals (1.5 million hospital days) were due to anxiety disorders, bipolar disorders, schizophrenia, major depression, personality disorders, eating disorders and suicidal behavior.

*Sources: The Report on Mental Illness in Canada, October 2002.
EBIC 1998 (Health Canada 2002), Stephens et al., 2001*