



CANADIAN COALITION FOR SENIORS' MENTAL HEALTH

To promote seniors' mental health by connecting people, ideas and resources

COALITION CANADIENNE POUR LA SANTÉ MENTALE DES PERSONNES ÂGÉES

Promouvoir la santé mentale des personnes âgées en reliant les personnes, les idées et les ressources

SENIORS' MENTAL HEALTH IN CANADA: POSITION PAPER & QUESTIONS TO CANDIDATES – 39TH GENERAL ELECTION

Canadians want to live in a society where they are ensured that those over age 65, including their parents, grandparents, families and friends, live in a country where mental health is enhanced and mental illness is treated with knowledge, compassion, respect and dignity.

Why Candidates Should Be Concerned With Seniors' Mental Health

Though it is known that seniors constitute one of the fastest growing population groups in Canada, surging to a total of 6.7 million people over the age of 65 by 2021,¹ there unfortunately remains a serious lack of information, policy, and initiative to advancing opportunities to improve and to promote the mental health of those over the age of 65. **There are currently over 4.2 million Canadians aged 65 and older.**¹ **Of these, at least 1 million seniors are living with a mental illness.**²

Consider The Facts On Seniors' Mental Health

- Seniors suffer from a wide array of mental illnesses including Mood, Anxiety and Psychotic Disorders and in addition, the emotional, behavioural and cognitive complications of a variety of brain diseases such as Alzheimer's Disease, Stroke and Parkinson's disease.
- Within nursing homes in Canada, 80-90% of residents live with a mental illness or some form of cognitive impairment.⁶
- The incidence of suicide in Canada is highest among men 80 years of age and older².
- It is predicted that depression will become the second leading cause of disability in Canada due to an aging population and social/economic factors.
- Up to half of the primary caregivers caring for someone with Alzheimer's develop significant psychological distress.³

¹ Health Canada, Division of Aging and Seniors; "A Quick Portrait of Canadian Seniors" Available: http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/seniors-aines/pubs/vignette/vig01_e.htm

² Canadian Coalition for Seniors' Mental Health. (May 2004). Position Paper: Mental Health and the Home Care Sector.

³ American Association of Geriatric Psychiatry, www.aagppa.org; "geriatrics and mental health – facts" as cited in Conn, D. (June 2003). Submission to The Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology.

Recommendations and CCSMH Position

- **Canadian Mental Health Commission:** The establishment of a Canadian Mental Health Commission as recommended by Senator Kirby and the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology is strongly supported. It is imperative that mental health be established as a long-term priority and that, seniors be identified as a special population group.
- **Systems of Care:** Care for seniors with mental health issues must be improved through the development and utilization of best practice guidelines, training and implementation of minimum standards, and guaranteed access to services.
- **Research:** Financial support is required to increase capacity in research in the field.
- **Education and Training:** Education and training on seniors' mental health prevention, assessment and intervention must be increased for practitioners in order to support enhanced care. Collaboration at government levels, Canadian Council on Health Service Accreditation and other stakeholders should occur to create standards of excellence defined within accreditation guidelines.
- **Public Education / Awareness:** Seniors face a double stigma. A National campaign is required to raise awareness and address the stigma of mental illness and seniors.
- **Caregiving:** Provide family caregivers with the necessary supports to successfully provide care including sources of relevant and meaningful mental health information for support services such as respite and home care. Access and funding for support services must be ensured as well.

Canadian Voters Over Age 65

An Elections Canada study in 2000 found that 83% of those 68 years of age and over voted and additionally, 80% of people aged 58 to 67 years voted.⁴ Of those over the age of 68 who did not vote in 2000, 42% indicated that the reason for not voting was that they didn't care about the issues.⁵ Given these statistics it is imperative that the interests of these voters are a key focus for government parties.

KEY QUESTIONS TO ALL CANDIDATES

- 1. Given the alarming statistics pertaining to seniors' mental health, what is your party's stance on seniors' mental health issues and your commitment to meeting the mental health needs of seniors and aging caregivers?**
- 2. What is your party's commitment to ensuring the establishment of the Canadian Mental Health Commission, recently recommended by Senator Kirby and the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology?**

⁴Edited Hansard 012; February 17th 2004, Parliament of Canada. Available: http://www.parl.gc.ca/37/3/parlbus/chambus/house/debates/012_2004-02-17/han012_1815-e.htm

⁵ Pammet, J.H., & LeDuc, L. (March 2003). Explaining the Turnout Decline in Canadian Federal Elections: A New Survey of Non-Voters.

About The Canadian Coalition for Seniors' Mental Health

The Canadian Coalition for Seniors' Mental Health (CCSMH) was established in 2002, with the mission to *“promote the mental health of seniors by connecting people, ideas and resources.”*

The strategic goals of the CCSMH include:

1. To ensure that Seniors' Mental Health is recognized as a key Canadian health and wellness issue
2. To facilitate initiatives related to enhancing and promoting seniors' mental health resources
3. To ensure growth and sustainability of the CCSMH

Strategic priority areas include:

- Public Awareness and Education
- Promoting Best/Promising Practices in Assessment, Management and Treatment
- Advocacy
- Research
- Caregiving

In order to meet the mission and goals, a number of strategic initiatives are facilitated by the CCSMH with the focus on the following areas:

- Advocacy and Public Awareness
- Education (i.e. Front Line Worker and Caregiver Catalogues)
- Research (i.e. Research Workshop; Research Network)
- Assessment and Treatment (i.e. Guidelines, National Survey)
- Family Caregivers
- Human Resources

Currently, the CCSMH has over 600 individual members and 85 organizational members from across Canada. These stakeholders are representative of local, provincial, territorial and federal organizations, healthcare practitioners, administrators, policy makers and caregivers.

CCSMH Steering Committee

*Canadian Academy of Geriatric Psychiatry
Canadian Association for Community Care
Canadian Association of Social Workers
Canadian Geriatrics Society
Canadian Mental Health Association
Canadian Psychological Association
College of Family Physicians of Canada*

*Alzheimer Society of Canada
Canadian Association of Retired Persons
Canadian Caregiver Coalition
Canadian Healthcare Association
Canadian Nurses Association
Canadian Society of Consulting Pharmacists
Public Health Agency of Canada (advisory)*

For more information, please contact:

***Faith Malach, Executive Director, Canadian Coalition for Seniors' Mental Health
416-785-2500 ext. 6331 or fmalach@baycrest.org
www.ccsmh.ca***