



NEWS RELEASE

MENTAL HEALTH COMMISSION OF CANADA SAYS VOLUNTEER SPIRIT WILL HELP CHANGE THE FACE OF MENTAL ILLNESS

Toronto, ON May 8, 2008 – It will take a national movement and a national charity to change attitudes and help change the way Canadians look at mental illness, according to the Honourable Michael Kirby, Chair of the Mental Health Commission of Canada. Kirby made the comments to members of the Empire Club of Canada in Toronto today.

He said the MHCC is working on a national 10-year anti-stigma campaign in an effort to battle the embarrassment and fear that often surround mental illness. New partnerships and new volunteers will be a key part of this national effort. “A major task of the Commission in the coming months will be to duplicate for mental health the kind of volunteer organization that exists for breast cancer, diabetes, heart disease and stroke,” Kirby said.

He called on all Canadians to become active supporters by donating the necessary ingredients of time, skills, money and spirit to the cause.

He asked for the help of the business community to help jump-start this movement, and said employers also have a role to play by improving the way in which mental health problems and illnesses are handled in the workplace. “It’s time for mental illness to come out of the shadows at last,” Kirby said. “You will be creating a new sense of compassion for those who suffer from mental illness.”

The MHCC also plans to establish a national charitable organization that will enable individuals and corporations to contribute money to the cause, and receive a charitable tax receipt. “For existing disease-based organizations, a great deal of their activity surrounding volunteers and positive media coverage is related to fundraising activities. It will therefore be necessary to incorporate a national not-for-profit charitable

organization as part of the infrastructure of the national mental health movement.” he explained.

The MHCC is a non-profit organization created to focus national attention on mental health issues. It is funded by the federal government but operates at arm’s length from all levels of government. The Commission’s objective is to enhance the health and social outcomes for Canadians living with mental health problems and illnesses.

The Commission was announced by Prime Minister Stephen Harper in response to one of the recommendations in the report by the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology, entitled “Out of the Shadows at Last.” Former Senator Michael Kirby was Chair of the Senate Committee at the time the report was released.

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