



## **MENTAL HEALTH COMMISSION OF CANADA**

**Mental Illness: Language and Content in News Media Coverage**

### **REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS**

Deadline for full proposal: **December 15, 2009**

**Contact for further information:**

**Micheal Pietrus, Director of Opening Minds, Director of Communications**

**Phone 403-385-4040**

**Email [mpietrus@mentalhealthcommission.ca](mailto:mpietrus@mentalhealthcommission.ca)**

*This Request for Proposals is intended to seek individuals or teams who can collect, review and synthesize information to assist the MHCC in advancing "promising practices" in mental health, and mental health care, where and when needed for the citizens of Canada.*

## 1. Context

The MHCC is an arms-length, federally funded, non-profit organization. It was created to focus national attention on mental health issues and to work to improve the health and social outcomes of people living with mental health problems and illnesses. The Government of Canada established the Commission in 2007 in response to the findings of a Senate-generated report *Out of the Shadows at Last – Transforming Mental Health, Mental Illness and Addiction Services in Canada*<sup>i</sup>.

The report recognizes the stigmatizing and discriminatory manner in which people with mental illness are treated by the news media. The language used to describe people with a lived experience and the content of stories about them are often negative. One anonymous contributor to the report stated it this way:

“More media coverage on the reality of mental illness, as opposed to the sensationalism and stigmatism of it, would be beneficial. People need to be taught that people with mental illness are not homicidal maniacs, as depicted on TV, but our friends, neighbours, professionals, etc.”

One of the key initiatives of the MHCC is a ten-year anti-stigma / anti-discrimination initiative, called Opening Minds. As part of this initiative, the Commission wishes to conduct research to monitor and interpret media coverage in Canada concerning mental health issues and illnesses.

## 2. Background

Dr. Heather Stuart, senior consultant for the Commission’s Anti-stigma / Anti-discrimination Initiative and Epidemiologist at Queen’s University in Kingston, Ontario, referred to media portrayal of mental illness in a recent article.

*“Studies consistently show that both entertainment and news media provide overwhelmingly dramatic and distorted images of mental illness that emphasize dangerousness, criminality and unpredictability. They also model negative reactions to the mentally ill, including fear, rejection, derision and ridicule.”<sup>ii</sup>*

This negative treatment in the news media has profound consequences for people with lived experiences with a mental illness. The media is often blamed for the stigma and discrimination consumers experience on a daily basis. Dr. Stuart suggests, however, the media, could instead be:

*“challenging public prejudices, initiating public debate, and projecting positive, human interest stories about people who live with a mental illness.”<sup>iii</sup>*

One of the goals of the Initiative is to help change media coverage of mental illness.

### 3. Objective

This project will analyze news media coverage of mental health, mental health problems and mental illness. This includes monitoring the language used in news reports and articles to describe individuals with a mental illness, the kinds of words used to define mental illness, the content of news and current affairs stories in the media, the tone of stories – whether it is primarily negative or positive, and the frequency of stories which probe deeper into the issues around mental illness. The project will review media coverage beginning in 2005, and track changes that may have occurred through that period of time, and moving forward. As well, the project will determine trends, measuring changes to language and content over time, providing audiences with coverage which is less stigmatizing and discriminatory towards people with mental illness.

### 4. Description of Work

The contractor will be working with the Director and Project Manager of the Commission's Anti-stigma / Anti-discrimination Initiative. MHCC will provide media monitoring, updated media reports, stories and items (newspaper, magazines, television, radio and on-line) on a regular basis to the contractor.

Status updates and consultation with the MHCC representatives will be scheduled on a regular basis. The term of the contract will be three years, although media trends and tracking will continue through the life of the Commission, so there is a likelihood of continuation of this contract.

### 5. Deliverables

Deliverables will include:

- (i) a detailed review of news media coverage from 2005 to present time, focusing on stories found in Canwest publications, Sun newspaper chain in large cities only, Globe and Mail, any additional large daily newspapers in key cities (Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Regina, Saskatoon, Winnipeg, Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal, Quebec City, Halifax, St. John's Nfld, Fredericton, Charlottetown), news magazines including Macleans, and other national publications;
- (ii) a comprehensive review of key media coverage over the next two years including print, and also television, radio and on-line;
- (iii) a study addressing the research questions outlined above;
- (iv) a mid-term progress report; and
- (v) a final report including time trend analysis, comparisons between types of media, geographic areas, etc.
- (vi) an Excel database containing the data summarized in the report.

Please review attached report: **Stigma and the Daily News: Evaluation of a Newspaper Intervention** published November, 2003, and follow the approach used in this research paper.

### **Estimated Value and Budget**

Please provide a budget over three years, from January 2010 to December 2012 and include the costs of personnel, and any requirement for consultation with experts or stakeholders. The budget should also include travel expenses that may be necessary for appropriate consultation with stakeholders, costs of printing of drafts for consultation, and office supplies.

### **Intellectual Property Rights**

The contractor will have publishing rights in regards to the research. The Commission requests a 60-day period to review the manuscript, so as to make suggested changes. The report/manuscript would remain the property of the researcher. The Commission will maintain the property rights of the resulting data from the research and of the database, and may make this data available to other researchers in the future for further analysis.

### **Criteria for Evaluating Proposals**

The mandatory requirements listed below will be evaluated. Proposals which fail to meet the following requirements will not be assessed further and the applicant's proposal will be considered non-responsive.

- A detailed statement of the work planned for carrying out this project must be submitted including the identification of specific outputs, a schedule for their completion, and a detailed budget.
- Understanding of the *Policy & Research Issues Related to the Objectives and Scope of Work*
  - The applicant should demonstrate understanding of the project requirements and objectives by situating the proposal within existing research and literature on the topic. Proposals should expand upon the background section outlined in the RFP.
- *Proposed Methodological Approach*
  - Proposals will be evaluated on the methodological approach outlined in the proposal. The applicant should thoroughly describe the methodological approach(es) and analyses to be used in the research and provide an understanding of how such approaches will meet the project objectives.
- *Relevant experience in similar studies*
  - Applicants should provide evidence of experience in conducting similar types of work relevant to this project as well as expertise in the analysis and synthesis of information as it pertains to the subject area.
  - Applicants should demonstrate experience conducting research with persons living with severe mental illness.
- *Academic qualifications*
  - Bidders must hold a graduate degree in a relevant discipline.
- The following certification MUST be included in the proposal and signed:
  - **Availability of Personnel**
  - The Applicant certifies that, should it be authorized to provide services under any Contract resulting from this solicitation, the persons proposed in its application will be

available to commence performance of the work immediately upon contract award and will remain available to perform the work in relation to the fulfillment of this requirement. Please also note that an ethics certificate will be required.

MENTAL HEALTH COMMISSION OF CANADA



Director, Communications  
Director, Opening Minds

October 22, 2009

**All proposals will become the property of the Mental Health Commission of Canada.**

**Estimated Project Timelines**

Submission deadline: December 15, 2009

Onset of contract: January 1, 2010

Final report completed: December, 2012

**Submission Process**

Please forward proposals to the MHCC no later than **December 15, 2009**. Proposals should include: (i) A resume outlining qualifications and related experience; (ii) approach and methods for carrying out the project; (iii) work plan, timelines, and detailed budget.

Please include contact information for two references who are knowledgeable about your or your teams' experience with related projects. Proposals are to be single-space, 11 pt font, and *not* exceed 10 pages in length. Respondent's background information, references and proposed budgets can be included as appendices.

**Contact Information**

Please submit proposals (**by email in Microsoft Word format**) to:

Micheal Pietrus,  
Director, Communications | Director, Opening Minds  
[mpietrus@mentalhealthcommission.ca](mailto:mpietrus@mentalhealthcommission.ca)

***Deadline December 15, 2009***

## **Contract Matters**

This RFP is not a legal offer, but only an invitation for proponents to submit a proposal to MHCC and shall not be construed as an agreement by MHCC to purchase any goods or services. MHCC shall not be bound to accept any proposal, or to enter into an agreement with any proponent submitting a proposal.

It is the proponent's responsibility to inform itself of all aspects of the project's requirements and the goods and services to be provided. No claim will be considered at any time for reimbursement for any expense incurred as a result of any misunderstanding in regard to the conditions or scope of the goods or services required.

Each proponent shall be responsible for any costs incurred during, or consequent upon, the preparation of its proposal, or the negotiation of any agreement with MHCC arising from their selection to provide any goods or services to MHCC.

Notwithstanding any other provision contained herein, MHCC in its sole discretion and without obligation to provide any reason therefore, shall have the unfettered right to, at any time and from time to time, do any of the following: (i) accept or reject any proposal at any time, including without limitation, a proposal that is received by MHCC after the proposal submission deadline; (ii) accept or reject individual items in a proposal; (iii) request clarification or further information regarding any item in a proposal; (iv) consider any alternate goods, services, terms or conditions that may be offered, whether such offer is contained in a proposal or otherwise; (v) split this RFP or any agreement negotiated in connection with same, into multiple parts and accept proposals (or portions thereof) from more than one proponent; (vi) enter negotiations, at any time before or after the proposal submission deadline with anyone, in relation to the subject matter hereof; (vii) if applicable, reject any proponent's recommendation of any subcontractor or any other third party associated with the proposal and jointly, along with such proponent, determine alternate acceptable third parties; (viii) extend or otherwise vary the proposal submission deadline, or any other timeline set out herein; (ix) revise or vary this RFP; (x) withdraw or cancel this RFP in whole or in part, whether having received any response hereto or not; and (xi) waive any of the stated requirements set out in this RFP or request non-compliant proponents to rectify any non-compliance within such time as MHCC may require.

No extension, variation, revision, withdrawal or cancellation of this RFP or any provision hereof shall be valid or binding on MHCC unless it is in writing and issued by a duly authorized representative of MHCC.

MHCC shall not at any time have any obligation to deal exclusively with any proponent, including the successful proponent (s). MHCC expressly reserves its rights and discretion to seek a proposal regarding the subject matter hereof, from any person whomsoever and at any time.

The successful proponent(s) will be notified in writing by MHCC of their selection as a party with whom MHCC wishes to negotiate an agreement. MHCC may, in its sole discretion, determine to move forward to the negotiation stage with one or more proponents, or it may determine to cancel this RFP. If an agreement cannot be negotiated with the successful proponent(s) within a time period satisfactory to MHCC, MHCC may at its sole discretion, terminate negotiations with that proponent(s) and either enter into negotiations with another proponent, or terminate this RFP process and not enter into an agreement with any of the proponents.

There will be no valid or binding agreement between the proponent and MHCC, and no proponent will acquire any legal or equitable rights or privileges, relative to the goods or services to be provided or this RFP until the execution of a written agreement between MHCC and the proponent.

### **Information Matters**

All information, including, without limitation, any specifications, instructions, notes and memoranda, provided at any time by MHCC or its agents or contractors, to the proponent, or to employees, agents or contractors of the proponent, in connection with the this request for proposals or project shall be and remain at all times the sole and absolute property of MHCC and its licensors and shall not be used by the proponent for any purpose other than its participation in this request for proposal process, without the express written consent of MHCC.

No publicity or discussions of the proponent's involvement or promotion of its relationship with MHCC shall be permitted until an agreement is fully executed by both parties and then only with the express written consent of MHCC. The failure of any proponent to do so shall be cause for the immediate rejection the proponent's proposal and the removal of the proponent from MHCC's approved vendor lists.

By submitting a proposal, proponents are acknowledging that their proposals may be shared with third parties as part of MHCC's evaluation and analysis process and hereby consent to same. Furthermore, proponents understand and agree that unless any option, scenario, opportunity, idea or process ("Idea") included in its proposal, is clearly identified in writing as proprietary to the proponent and meets the criteria that give rise to trade secret protection under applicable law, proponents will not be entitled to claim any compensation of any nature if said Idea is later used or implemented by or on behalf of MHCC, in whole or in part, whether pursuant to the contract contemplated by this request for proposals otherwise. No compensation will be due if MHCC developed the Idea itself without reference to the proposal, had prior knowledge of the Idea, holds or otherwise acquires proprietary rights to the Idea, or has not committed any fault or negligence with respect to its use of the Idea.

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<sup>i</sup> Standing Committee on Social Affairs. (2006). *Out of the Shadows at Last: Transforming Mental Health, Mental Illness, and Addictions Services in Canada*. Ottawa, Ontario: The Parliament of Canada.

Report available at <http://www.parl.gc.ca/39/1/parlbus/commbus/senate/com-e/soci-e/rep-e/pdf/rep02may06part1-e.pdf>.

<sup>ii</sup> Stuart H. Media Portrayal of Mental Illness and its Treatment: What Effect Does it Have on People with Mental Illness? *CNS Drugs* 2006; 20 (2) 99-106.

<sup>iii</sup> Stuart H. Media Portrayal of Mental Illness and its Treatment: What Effect Does it Have on People with Mental Illness? *CNS Drugs* 2006; 20 (2) 99-106