



Silver Dinner Remarks

By Michael Kirby
Chair

Mental Health Commission of Canada

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Canadian Psychiatric Research Foundation
Silver Dinner
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Thank you Kevin...Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. It's really heart-warming for me to see so many people come out to support mental health. Mental health is something that I have had a special personal interest in for many years.

As you know, a few years ago the Senate Social Affairs Committee produced the first ever national report on mental health, *Out of the Shadows at Last*. One of its key recommendations was the creation of the Mental Health Commission of Canada. The report was published in May 2006 and less than a year later, the federal government provided funding for the Mental Health Commission of Canada. The first meeting of the Commission's Board took place in Calgary 14 months ago.

In the past year, much has been accomplished. We've created an organization and hired staff. We've established eight advisory committees, each with a special area of focus -- from children and youth to seniors -- from mental health and the law to family caregivers. With representatives from across the country, these advisory committees have started 24

research projects related to their special areas of expertise and in support of the Commission's key initiatives

We've begun the work of developing a national mental health strategy for the country. Canada is the only G8 country without one. This national strategy will be a comprehensive framework and take into account Canada's unique and often frustrating jurisdictional realities.

The national strategy will also be practical. It will push for system change at the same time being politically feasible. There is no sense producing a strategy which is theoretically perfect but politically impossible to implement.

Another of our major initiatives involves five research projects across the country to address the issue of homelessness and mental illness. And soon we'll start work on building a web-based Knowledge Exchange Centre.

The Commission is also in the process of developing a 10-year anti-stigma campaign. Stigma is the single biggest barrier preventing people with mental illness from seeking help. We must change the attitude of Canadians toward mental illness if we are to succeed in our ultimate objective of bringing mental health out of the shadows forever.

To help both our anti-stigma campaign and our research program, we have created Mental Health Partnerships of Canada, which is well on its way to getting its charitable status from the Canada Revenue Agency. It is setup to support the goals of the Mental Health Commission of Canada, however, it is designed operate as a separate entity with its own board of directors.

You can learn more about the Commission and our initiatives by logging on to our website at www.mentalhealthcommission.ca .

But what I am especially excited to share with you this evening is more of the good news that Kevin was just telling you about. And that is that CPRF and Mental Health Partnerships of Canada have signed a memorandum of understanding. This agreement will create a major new national charity in Canada solely focused on fund-raising for mental health. It will support research and demonstration projects in the fields of mental health, mental illness and brain injury. We hope this new national charity will capture the hearts of Canadians everywhere.

This new organization will have a solid foundation through the CPRF's almost 30 year history of funding mental health research. The CPRF's important research work, peer review, and publishing capability will continue, with, we hope, an even higher public profile.

At the same time, Mental Health Partnerships of Canada will create a charity for mental health on a scale with charities such as Breast Cancer, and Heart and Stroke. A national charity is critical if we want to keep mental illness *out of the shadows forever*.

To go along with the new national charity, the Mental Health Commission of Canada intends to launch a social movement -- to recruit an army of volunteers -- in support of mental health. We believe we will be able to attract thousands of volunteers at the grass roots and local community level across Canada to both help us raise money, but equally important, to help us raise awareness of mental illness, to keep mental illness in the public eye and in so doing help us decrease the stigma associated with mental illness.

Members of this army of volunteers will be known as Partners for Mental Health. .

Partners for Mental Health will also have an important role in creating the political will across multiple jurisdictions to support and implement the national mental health strategy.

We are taking our cue from the Breast Cancer and Heart and Stroke volunteer movements. Volunteers for those organizations have established

a strong presence on the political agenda. They are successful at keeping their cause – their disease -- in the public eye. In addition to raising money, they volunteer in health institutions -- they mount campaigns to persuade government to increase funding for treatment and research -- and they do everything they can to ensure that the public never loses sight of their concerns. Through these activities, we will build on past efforts of existing mental health organizations, but move everything to the next level.

Since the Commission was established, many Canadians have asked us what they can do to help. We anticipate thousands of Canadians will want to join our army of volunteers to help us succeed in keeping mental health out of the shadows forever. Now, through our social movement, we will be able to offer them a variety of ways they can work with us to help us achieve our objectives. We hope everyone in this room joins this movement too. Join up – and encourage your family, friends and co-workers to join as well.

With the help of each and every one of you we can turn the words of Roy Muise into a reality. Roy is a person living with a mental illness who testified before the Senate Committee in Halifax. He challenged all Canadians with these words:

“To the people of Canada, I say welcome us into society as full partners. We are not to be feared or pitied. Remember, we are your mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers, your friends, co-workers and children. Join hands and travel together with us on our road to recovery.”