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COMMISSION SUPPORTS A MENTAL HEALTH STRATEGY FOR CORRECTIONS IN CANADA

CALGARY, March 3, 2009 – The Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) announced today it supports a proposal from Canada’s Correctional Investigator Howard Sapers, that the Commission should design a national mental health strategy to address the mental health needs of persons who are under the supervision of the Correctional Services of Canada.

“We welcome the Correctional Investigator’s recommendation and look forward to working with Correctional Services of Canada and other elements of the criminal justice system, such as police and the courts, in developing what will be an important part of Canada’s Mental Health Strategy,” said MHCC President and CEO, Michael Howlett.

The recommendation was one of sixteen made by Sapers in a report released today investigating the death of 19-year-old Ashley Smith in an Ontario correctional institution in 2007. The report found Smith did not receive the necessary mental health supports and treatments that may have averted her death.

“The Commission is currently developing a mental health strategy for Canada, one of the key initiatives mandated by the federal government,” said Howlett. “A crucial part of that initiative will be the development of strategies that are aimed at specific groups of Canadians, whether they are children and youth, seniors, Aboriginal, Inuit, and Métis persons, or people with mental illness who are involved with the criminal justice system.”

The MHCC is presently conducting a public consultation to find out what Canadians believe should be included in a national strategy. Howlett encouraged all Canadians to participate in this electronic consultation process at: www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/strategy

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. www.mentalhealthcommission.ca

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