



NEWS RELEASE

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MENTAL HEALTH COMMISSION OF CANADA RESPONDS ON CORRECTIONAL INVESTIGATOR'S REPORT

CALGARY - The Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) applauds the strong stand of the *Annual Report of the Office of the Correctional Investigator* on the need to address the 'serious and pressing issue' of mental illness within the prison population today.

"Our prisons are housing the largest psychiatric population in the country," says Michael Kirby, Chair of the Mental Health Commission of Canada. "If we don't take steps to address this reality, we're leaving out a significant segment of the population that is entitled to the same level of healthcare as the rest of us."

Kirby goes on to say that not dealing with this is equivalent to going backwards to the time when society didn't talk about mental health issues, as if ignoring the situation would make it go away.

MHCC Chief Operating Officer, Louise Bradley notes the Correctional Investigator's recommendations are in line with those of the World Health Organization which urges that comprehensive action is needed to prevent prisons from becoming 21st Century asylums for the mentally ill.

"Many prisoners need treatment, but receive punishment instead," says Bradley. "The ultimate benefit of treating those in the prison population who have mental health issues should be a reduction in the number of people ending up in the prison system in the first place."

The MHCC also supports other key recommendations of the report, including:

- Correctional services hiring more mental health staff and increasing mental health training for existing staff
- Better mental health screening of inmates
- Developing clinical management plans for offenders with mental disorders
- Establishing intermediate mental health care capacity in each region, and
- Creating interdisciplinary teams made up of mental health, security and case management personnel.

"It's time to start taking action," says Kirby. "It's in everybody's best interests to make dealing with mental health issues within the prison population a priority."

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 it. The MHCC does not provide services, but rather acts as a catalyst for action. The ultimate purpose is to create an integrated mental health system that places people living with mental illness at its centre.

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

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