



Louise Bradley, President and Chief Executive Officer, Mental Health Commission of Canada

With strong roots in Newfoundland, Ms. Bradley is leading the drive to “alter the entire landscape of mental health care in Canada”

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Sitting in her office in Calgary, Louise Bradley points to a picture on her wall showing the St. John’s waterfront with a large iceberg in the harbour.

“That’s a beautiful picture, one that’s very symbolic for me,” says Ms. Bradley, who was appointed President and Chief Executive Officer of the Mental Health Commission of Canada on April 1, 2010, and is in St. John’s from September 9 to 13 for the Commission’s first-ever Board meeting in Newfoundland.

“I’m a very proud Newfoundlander. It’s a large part of my identity. Whenever I’m there, I feel grounded, so to be able to visit Newfoundland in my capacity with the Commission, of which I am equally as proud, is like the coming together of two very important pieces of my life.”

Born and raised in St. John’s, Ms. Bradley still refers to herself as “a townie” and says she was “very fortunate to have had some very strong people in my life who took an interest in me as a youth in Newfoundland”.

“I credit them for the fact that I was able to go on and to, hopefully, give something back to society.”

The Mental Health Commission of Canada is a non-profit organization established by the federal government in 2007 that is working with every province and territory to focus national attention on mental health issues and improve the health and social outcomes of people living with mental illness.

“The Commission and our many partners across the country are working together to alter the entire landscape of mental health care in Canada,” says Ms. Bradley.

Five key initiatives

Since she joined the Commission in the spring of 2009, Ms. Bradley has been leading its work on five key initiatives:

- the development of Canada’s first-ever Mental Health Strategy (Canada is the only G8 country without one);
- *Opening Minds*, a national anti-stigma initiative aimed at changing people’s attitudes and behaviours towards those living with mental health issues;
- *At Home / Chez Soi*, the largest research project of its kind in the world studying mental illness and homelessness through which 1,325 homeless Canadians living with a mental illness are being given a roof over their heads as well as health and social supports in five cities (Moncton; Montreal; Toronto; Winnipeg; and Vancouver);

- *A Knowledge Exchange Centre*, which will provide high-quality information about mental health, with an opportunity to collaborate and share knowledge, so that everyone can participate in transforming mindsets, behaviours, practices and policies;
- *Partners for Mental Health*, a national social movement to achieve transformative change in mental health.

“What the Commission and its partners have achieved to date is a quantum leap from where Canada was just a few years ago; and, equally, what we will achieve together going forward will be a quantum leap from where we are today. This will be of great benefit to all Canadians.

“This year alone, more than seven million Canadians will experience a mental illness. That’s one in five people. And some researchers suggest that one in two people will experience a mental health issue of some degree at least once in their lifetime. So it’s no exaggeration to say that mental illness will have an impact on all of us sooner or later – either personally, or affecting someone we know or someone we love.”

She adds: “There’s a crying need to open up the discussion about mental illness, but people are held back by the stigma that still attaches itself to mental illness and the discrimination that continues to afflict so many of those living with mental illness. That’s why initiatives like *Opening Minds* and *At Home / Chez So* are so important. Through them, we’re offering every Canadian living with mental illness real hope and raising the potential for treatment and recovery. We fully recognize we won’t change everything overnight, but we’re confident it can be done.”

Career began in Newfoundland

Ms. Bradley’s career in the mental health field began as a nurse in Newfoundland in the mid-1970s.

“I did my RN at Western Memorial Regional Hospital in Corner Brook and it was there that I first became interested in psychiatric nursing. It was just a natural interest for me. I’ve always had a curiosity about how people’s minds work, how people think.

“My first job in nursing was in paediatrics and for the three or four months that I worked there, I went home at the end of every shift and pretty much cried my heart out because while I was doing procedures to children with their families there, really what I wanted to do is sit down and talk to them about the experience and how they were feeling and I couldn’t do that. If I did, the IV down the hall would run dry.”

Having graduated as an RN in 1977, Ms. Bradley later attended Memorial University of Newfoundland for a post-graduate diploma in psychiatric nursing. She completed her post-graduate degree at Dalhousie University in 1984 and in the early 1990s obtained a Master of Science degree in psychogeriatrics from Northeastern University in Boston.

Ms. Bradley’s work experience ranges from community mental health to forensic and corrections health care and she has worked as a therapist, a researcher, an educator and an administrator. Immediately prior to joining the Commission’s senior leadership team, she was Senior Operating Officer for the University of Alberta Hospital in Edmonton, one of Canada’s largest tertiary care hospitals, where she was responsible for everything but mental health care.

“A surgeon in Edmonton asked me if I missed working in mental health and I looked at him and said ‘What makes you think I ever left?’ That’s because I was still using my mental health skills there every bit as much as I did in any of the mental health settings I had worked in before that. And the key skill – whether you’re a nurse, a doctor, an administrator or the family of someone who is very, very ill – is to really care for and care about the *whole* person.”

Praise for Newfoundland and Labrador

Ms. Bradley praised the people of Newfoundland and Labrador for “their real and tangible commitment to the Commission’s vision”.

For example, the Commission is partnering with the Newfoundland and Labrador branch of the Canadian Mental Health Association as part of the Commission’s *Opening Minds* anti-stigma initiative.

The Commission is also providing a program Canada-wide called Mental Health First Aid, which trains people to respond to mental health emergencies, enabling them to better manage both potential and developing mental health problems in themselves and others. In Newfoundland, there are now four Mental Health First Aid instructors in different communities across the province, as well as over 230 trained mental health first aiders.

“What I see every time I visit Newfoundland and Labrador are people who care deeply about mental health issues,” says Ms. Bradley. “It’s a small population and a large geography, which poses challenges that aren’t necessarily the same as elsewhere in the country. They’re looking for ways to try to offset that, and while it isn’t easy, there are some excellent services and programs in the province.

“I believe everyone who is active in the mental health field is driven by the knowledge that our work will have a truly positive impact on the lives of people living with a mental illness and their families. By travelling down this road together, we’ll help make mental health a priority for all Canadians and bring mental illness out of the shadows forever.”