



Mental Health
Commission
of Canada

Commission de
la santé mentale
du Canada

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

National Guidelines for a Comprehensive Services System to Support Family Caregivers of Adults with Mental Health Problems and Illnesses

Why do we need these *Guidelines*?

Family caregivers of adults with mental illnesses play a crucial role by providing support and advocating for their relatives and contributing to their recovery. The need for family caregiver support is urgent. Failure to recognize, acknowledge and support family caregivers heightens their risk of becoming “collateral casualties” of mental illness by potentially compromising their health and quality of life, thereby reducing the efficacy of the help they can provide to their relatives and increasing costs to the health and social service systems.

What are the next steps, now that the Mental Health Commission of Canada has released these *Guidelines*?

Moving forward with these *Guidelines* requires political will and grassroots action by all stakeholders. Strong and committed leadership is needed to achieve a transformed mental health system where recovery-oriented programs and services acknowledge the importance of family caregivers, support them in their caregiving role and recognize and respond to their needs. This leadership is not the sole responsibility of those working within the formal mental health system, but also requires action on the part of other professionals within provincial, territorial and federal governments, as well as a range of other organizations.

What would the financial impact be of adopting these *Guidelines*?

The unpaid care and support provided by family caregivers makes a major contribution to the health and social service system, which would be very costly to replace with paid formal services. To date, no accurate estimate has been calculated as to how much family caregivers save the health and social service system. However, researchers estimated that in 2006, caregiving costs for persons with mental illness added up to \$3.9 billion in Canada alone.

The cost of implementing all recommendations included in these *Guidelines* across the country hasn't been projected as part of the initiative. However, there is a significant cost to not doing anything and risking more “collateral casualties” among family caregivers of adults with mental illnesses.

Can you provide examples of things that would help caregivers and reduce stress levels?

- Knowing that their relative is receiving appropriate care and is getting the services and supports needed for them to improve their quality of life
- Being involved in assessment and treatment planning for their loved one



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- Getting information and timely support from knowledgeable mental health service providers, including in enhancing their coping skills
- Having their personal needs outside of their caregiving role recognized and supported to sustain their own health and emotional wellbeing

Contact:

Kyle Marr, Senior Communication Specialist
Mental Health Commission of Canada

Office: (403) 385-4050

Cell: (587) 226-8782

kmarr@mentalhealthcommission.ca



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