



NEWS RELEASE

Opening Minds to take the stigma out of Mental Illness

CALGARY, AB October 2, 2009 - **Opening Minds**, the largest systematic effort in Canadian history to reduce the stigma of mental illness, was launched today by the Honourable Michael Kirby, Chair of the Mental Health Commission of Canada. "More than seven million Canadians will experience a mental health problem in 2009. Many of these people will **not** seek help because of the stigma surrounding mental illness. In fact, people who live with mental illness tell us that the stigma is often worse than the disease itself", says Kirby.

Mr. Kirby was speaking at the launch of **Opening Minds**, the Commission's 10-year Anti-stigma / Anti-discrimination Initiative. **Opening Minds** is aimed at changing the attitudes and behaviours of Canadians toward mental illness.

The first phase of **Opening Minds** targets children and youth, and health care providers. "Symptoms of the disease most often appear in adolescence. Early treatment can make a big difference to quality of life. Our children and youth are our future and we need to ensure they can grow up with good physical and mental health", says Kirby.

Health care professionals are also a focus of **Opening Minds**. Many people seeking help report that front-line health care providers often discriminate against them.

Earlier this year, the Commission issued a Canada-wide Request for Interest (RFI) to groups that work in the mental health field. "We don't want to reinvent the wheel. We want to work with organizations already operating anti-stigma projects", says Kirby.

248 proposals were received in May 2009. An independent panel helped select 36 projects for **Opening Minds**. These will be evaluated for their effectiveness and assessed for their potential to operate nationally.

Every day, half a million Canadians are absent from work due to mental health problems and this costs the Canadian economy \$33 billion. In 2010, the workforce will be added as an **Opening Minds** target. Additional target groups will be identified as the program moves forward.

The **Opening Minds** launch took place atop the Calgary Tower as a new day dawned with the hope of a stigma-free Canada. The flame on the tower burned from 6 a.m. to 8:30 a.m. to symbolically bring mental illness out of the shadows forever.

The Mental Health Commission of Canada is a non-profit organization created to focus national attention on mental health issues and to work to improve the health and social outcomes of people living with mental illness.

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- For pictures or video of the event please go to: www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/openingminds

October 4 – 10 is Mental Illness Awareness Week



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