



SPEAKING NOTES

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Chair
Mental Health Commission of Canada

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Calgary Chamber of Commerce, Calgary

Speaking Notes for Calgary Chamber Address May 4, 2009

Theme of address is "The Time is Now"

While there has always been a need to improve supports and service for people with mental health problems, the recession is placing incredible strain on the mental health system in Canada that has been neglected for far too long. Alberta and Calgary are not immune.

Alberta Picture:

- 700-thousand Albertans will develop a mental illness this year. That's one in five. Some experts estimate it is one in four. Ask them to do the math (200-thousand Calgarians affected)
- Not just numbers, there are faces behind those statistics
- Look at the impact of the recession:
 - Between October '08 and March '09 Alberta has lost 48-thousand jobs
 - 15-thousand jobs lost in March alone
 - Job losses in Alberta ranked second in Canada after British Columbia in March.
- In 2002-03, just over 500-thousand Albertans treated by a physician for mental health related problem; there were more than 2.25 million visits to a physician for the primary purpose of receiving treatment for a mental health problem
- 39 per cent of all general practice physician billings were mental health related
- More than 34-thousand Albertans went to a hospital emergency dept. in 2001-02 because of a mental health problem
- One third of people with a mental illness in Edmonton also have a substance abuse problem; very likely same statistic in Calgary

Picture in Calgary:

- Unemployment figures in Calgary doubled from March 08 to March 09. Number of unemployed went from 23-thousand to 46-thousand.
- Hardest hit job areas are the trades, professional, scientific and technical services
- Consumer confidence is lingering at a record low
- Calgary has a history of "boom and bust" (things still not as bad as when the NEP was introduced in the early 80's)

Beyond Beds – to Balanced Care Mental Health: (this is the report that was leaked to the NDP)

- Alberta Government report identifies a lack of housing and beds for the mentally ill as a major issue
 - Two year old report states that Alberta has around 0.45 beds per 1,000 population. Should be closer to 0.70.
 - Mental health costs Alberta's economy about \$5 billion annually.
- The study was completed in January 2007, well before the current economic downturn.
- Recommendations not adopted

Impact of economy on mental health

- Canadian communities are seeing more layoffs, downsizing, underemployment and early retirement.
 - Between October '08 and March '09, 295,000 Canadians lost their jobs.
 - Mental illness costs the Canadian economy an estimated \$33 billion a year (costs Alberta \$5 billion)
 - Disability from mental illness represents four to 12 per cent of payroll costs in Canada
 - Mental health claims, especially for depression, have overtaken heart disease
- Margaret Chan, Director General of the World Health Organization: "We should not be surprised or underestimate the turbulence and likely consequences of the current financial crisis... It should not come as a surprise that we continue to see more stresses, suicides and mental disorders."
- WHO indicates that governments worldwide need to make mental health a vital part of primary health care.
- *Before* the economic downturn, Canadians cited finances as their top source of stress more frequently than any other issue.

Employment and mental health

- Viable, steady income contributes to stability and wellness.
- If people are unemployed, it can be very difficult to carry on and see a purpose in life, particularly if they are older and their prospects of finding work may not be very good.

- 'Adjustment disorder' is difficulty making an adjustment to a new status that one did not choose. This comes up when moving from working to nonworking status. Hazards include:
 - Depression and anxiety
 - Worry and fatigue
 - Increase in substance abuse/gambling
 - Stressed family and interpersonal relationships
 - Boredom
 - Anger and sadness
 - Poor self-esteem and self-image
- Research in New Zealand: men and women aged 25 to 44 who were unemployed were two to three times as likely to commit suicide.
- Sociological explanation might be that the unemployment rate in a society is a marker of a lack of social cohesion that in turn is associated with suicide.
- This isn't news: over 20 years ago, Canadian Mental Health Association report noted that unemployment leads to a rise in mental health problems, increased hospitalization and suicide.
- 2004 study in the *American Journal of Public Health*: unemployment is associated with poor mental health as a result of the absence of *non-financial* benefits provided by one's job: social status, self-esteem, physical and mental activity and use of one's skills.
 - Higher impact on men's health than on women's. Explained by presence of family responsibilities. Also, men tend to be less involved in 'nurturing' family roles, which cannot successfully replace their job as an alternative source of meaning in their lives.

Windsor, Ontario as an example:

- This auto town has been hit early and hard by the recession. Demand for mental health services jumped 50 per cent last year. There is anecdotal evidence that this increase has continued unabated as the local economy suffers.
- Many families have both partners working in the auto industry and are already laid off. Many who have not been laid off are afraid they will be or will lose their pensions.
- Family physician from Windsor remarked that she's seeing people come in to her office to discuss which medications they can afford, which they must cut back now that they don't have benefit plans.

Heart meds, anti-depression meds...less access to support is having an impact in communities.

- One of the Windsor food banks is seeing families requiring their services who have been living paycheck to paycheck and are now laid off. These people have to wait 6-8 weeks for welfare.

Hidden Casualties in Windsor:

- Taking its toll on the young. The number of children and adolescents in Windsor who are suicidal has nearly tripled since the downturn.
 - When there are job losses or money woes, parents can be anxious, depressed or irritable and children tend to feel responsible.
 - Children worry and take on grown up problems.
 - Windsor Regional Children's Centre has seen an influx of kids with no previous mental health problems who are suddenly experiencing severe anxiety, depression or acting out; and those with pre-existing mental health conditions that are exacerbated by new stress.
 - When they are anxious, their schoolwork suffers, sleep patterns are disrupted and they get sick, physically and mentally. To make matters worse, they are reluctant to reach out to their parents, who are already stressed out.
 - If we don't find a way to support the parents, children who are now well adjusted will begin having problems.

Effects on Men in Windsor:

- Unusually high number of men seeking support. Common themes coming from health care providers in primary care settings.
 - For example, a male client makes an appointment with his physician, ostensibly about his arm. In the privacy of the appointment, he begins sobbing, saying he is unemployed and his wife is leaving him. Community health centre teams are seeing this as a regular occurrence.

Durham Region, Ontario

- Historically, local Canadian Mental Health Association tends to serve those with a diagnosed mental illness. A new clientele is emerging: people in job-related crisis.
- CMHA is getting more calls and questions from people on sick leave regarding how to deal with insurance companies that are trying to push them back to work prematurely.

- Requests for family and individual counseling have also risen. Two programs for couples aimed at helping families deal with the economic downturn are full and now have waiting lists.
- CMHA facilitates applications to Share the Warmth Program. Many more people are seeking help to pay power bills this year.
- Cyclical/downward spiral: people have been laid off, losing access to their EAP. They are turning to community programs, like CMHA which are already overloaded. As General Motors lays off more workers, the United Way receives fewer donations and have less funding to offer agencies. CMHA has been seriously affected. Former donors are now the clients and capacity is reduced.

Work of the Mental Health Commission of Canada

- *Out of the Shadows at Last*, Canada's first-ever national report on mental health completed in May 2006
- Key recommendation was creation of the MHCC. First Board meeting in Calgary in September 2007
- Funded by the federal government, but operates at arm's length. Commission has the support of all provincial and territorial governments except Quebec.
- We exist to promote mental health in Canada, to change the attitudes of Canadians toward mental health issues and to work with stakeholders to improve mental health services and supports.
- Commission has come a long way in 20 months
- Four key initiatives:
 - **Mental Health Strategy** – only G8 country without a strategy. Draft framework developed; consultations in 13 cities, more than people participated 13-hundred online
 - **Mental health & Homelessness Research Demonstration Projects** – largest research project of its kind in the world studying mental health and homelessness. 2225 homeless mentally ill to participate; 1335 to receive housing and supports
 - **Anti-Stigma / Anti-discrimination Initiative** – biggest systematic effort to reduce the stigma associated with mental illness in Canadian history. Focus is to change attitudes and behaviours. Two target groups in Phase One of the campaign
 - **Knowledge Exchange Centre** – will create a web based site that will give mental health service users, stakeholders, researchers and scientists an easy way to share knowledge and exchange information.

- **Eight Advisory Committees**

There is hope. Recovery is possible: The Time is Now

- We need the partnership of Canadian leaders like those in the room; can't do it alone
- It is in the economic interest of employers to work actively to improve the mental wellbeing of their employees and to accelerate their return to work following a period of mental illness.
 - 85% of new jobs coming on stream demand cerebral and not manual skills. In such an economy, the mental health of the workforce is critical: mental health issues must become front and centre in the economic affairs of our country.
 - Making our workplaces more mental health friendly will have an enormous economic impact – both on the economy as a whole, and for every individual business that improves the mental health of its workforce.
- We need strategies to equip mental health systems to respond to the effects of the economic downturn in terms of services and prevention strategies.
- We need to promote mental wellbeing and put the supports in place to prevent progression to mental illness.
- The time is now to take steps to make progress and improve the lives of people living with mental health problems.
- Whether for prevention or treatment, the time is now to change attitudes and to reduce the stigma that prevents people from reaching out for help.

Partners for Mental Health & Mental Health Partnerships of Canada

All Canadians can play a role in keeping mental health out of the shadow forever.