



Canadian Psychiatric Association
Dedicated to quality care
Association des psychiatres du Canada
Dévouée aux soins de qualité

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Preliminary CPA Statement

*Issued by Dr. Donald Milliken
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Responding to
Out of the Shadows At Last:
The Final Report of the Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology
May 9, 2006*

As President of the Canadian Psychiatric Association (CPA) I would like to congratulate the Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology for their visionary report, *Out of the Shadows at Last*.

As psychiatrists who treat the most seriously mentally ill in our society – and who are often frustrated with society's ability to care for those individuals and families who suffer -- we believe this report goes a long way towards raising awareness among our politicians, policymakers and ordinary Canadians about the state of mental illness in Canada. It is the most important report since the Hall Commission.

The Senate Committee, in our view, has done two things of great importance.

It has stated, for the first time in a national context, that the services available to patients with psychiatric illnesses – illnesses that are always distressing, often disabling, sometimes crippling and all-too-often fatal – must be treated with the same seriousness and supports as physical illnesses of equivalent severity.

It has also given the gift of hope to those who have been suffering from mental illness and who have had to struggle to get the resources and supports needed to lead normal lives. It has given hope, too, to psychiatrists and our colleagues in nursing, family practice, psychology, social work and community support. We have long been frustrated on a day-to-day basis because we know what needs to happen to make the system better and we have been unable to change things.

The Senate Committee recommends that mental illness be treated on par with other serious illnesses. It recommends a broad series of strategies to achieve that goal – all designed to ensure that those suffering from mental illness achieve “a reduction or complete remission of symptoms” or at least “recovery that constitutes living a satisfying, hopeful and productive life even with the limitations caused by mental illness.”

These are inspiring words – not just for patients, but for all of us who work with patients and families. We are grateful for the Committee's work and further heartened by the fact the Committee regards its work as “much more than just another policy study: it is truly a calling.”

Like the Senate Committee, CPA members believe that services must be integrated with care. This will require additional supports in terms of living conditions and housing. Moreover, we echo the Senate's suggestion that care must be collaborative, comprehensive, team-based and multi-tiered. It must be responsive to the specific needs of the individual patients and their illnesses. In other words, one size cannot fit all.

The CPA, in conjunction with our professional colleagues, have said frequently that we know what we have to do to change the system. What is more important, in our view, is to recognize that we as a society pay a very large price – both socially and economically – for doing nothing to bring mental illness “out of the shadows.”

The Senate Committee study includes a series of critical first steps that will help us achieve the main goal – improved access to best practice care and prevention.

- It is a first step towards enabling the provinces and territories to agree on a national action plan and to improve access for best practices services across Canada. The transition fund and the Commission are the mechanisms we urgently need to make this happen.
- It is a first step to improving services for the populations for which the federal government has service responsibilities – the armed forces, those in federal prisons, Aboriginal peoples and the RCMP.
- It is a step towards addressing issues relating to the mental health of children and adolescents. Access to mental health care is now extremely limited for our youngest citizens and only through early intervention can we ensure their healthy development and reduce psychiatric illness in later life.
- It is a step towards ensuring that our oldest citizens receive mental health care that is early, appropriate and preventative, and allows them to live in their communities among family and friends – and not in human warehouses.
- It is a step towards helping those in trouble with the law, many of whom suffer from mental illness. Prevention is key, but so is ensuring adequate resources exist to treat mental illness which is prevalent in our correctional facilities.
- It is a step towards providing research funding to our 16 university psychiatric departments and other researchers in Canada to help the existing system better meet the needs of Canadians.

It is our sincere hope that the Harper government act quickly to respond to the Senate Committee, to establish a Canadian Mental Health Commission with dedicated funding to ensure that transitional supports in the community become a reality, while at the same time guaranteeing resources in our psychiatric facilities and hospitals.

We endorse the Committee's recommendations and commend the many Canadians who bravely stepped forward to tell their stories.