

# FOREWORD

Mental illnesses touch the lives of all Canadians, exerting a major effect on relationships, education, productivity and overall quality of life. Approximately 20% of individuals will experience a mental illness during their lifetime, and the remaining 80% will be affected by an illness in family members, friends or colleagues. With sufficient attention and resources, much can be done to improve the lives of people living with mental illness.

*A Report on Mental Illnesses in Canada* is designed to raise the profile of mental illness among government and non-government organizations, and the industry, education, workplace, and academic sectors. It describes major mental illnesses and outlines their incidence and prevalence, causation, impact, stigma, and prevention and treatment. Policy makers will find the information contained in this report valuable for shaping policies and services aimed at improving the quality of life of people with mental illness.

Five mental illnesses and the phenomenon of suicidal behaviour have been selected for inclusion in this document by virtue of their high prevalence rates or because of the magnitude of their health, social and economic impact. Suicidal behaviour, while not in itself a mental illness, is highly correlated with mental illness and raises many similar issues. Future reports will address other mental illnesses as well as addictions.

*A Report on Mental Illnesses in Canada* responds to a recommendation from the Workshop on Mental Illnesses Surveillance, organized in September 1999 by the Canadian Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health (CAMIMH), with assistance from Health Canada. The workshop recommended the collation of existing data as the first step toward developing a surveillance system to monitor mental illnesses in Canada.

To study mental illnesses in Canada, this report uses the Canadian data that are currently available (hospitalizations in general hospitals and mortality data), as well as provincial studies. (See Appendix A - Data Sources.) Hospitalization data have limitations, however. Many factors other than the prevalence and severity of illness can influence hospital admissions and lengths of stay. Moreover, the majority of people with mental illnesses are treated in the community rather than in hospitals, and many may not be treated at all within the formal health care system. Data from provincial psychiatric hospitals would provide additional insight, but these data were unavailable by type of illness at the time of writing.

Future reports will benefit from more current and detailed population data from Statistics Canada's Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS) - Mental Health and Well Being (to be completed in 2003) and the Development of Indicators for Mental Health and Addiction Services project at the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI). These will only begin to fill the gaps in data, however. Each chapter of this report identifies additional information that would provide a more complete foundation on which to plan and evaluate policies, programs and services for mental illnesses.

## ***A Report on Mental Illnesses in Canada***

If you would like more copies or have any comments on the report or suggestions for future reports please contact:

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The report is also available at the following Websites:

Health Canada: <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/pphb-dgspsp/publicat/miic-mmacc/index.html>

Canadian Mental Health Association: <http://www.cmha.ca>

The Mood Disorders Society of Canada: <http://www.mooddorderscanada.ca>