



Centre
for Addiction and
Mental Health
Centre de
toxicomanie et
de santé mentale

Media Release

Reform of Medicare Needs to Include People who Experience Mental Illness and Addiction Centre for Addiction and Mental Health Recommends to Romanow Commission

Toronto (May 31, 2002): Appearing before the Commission on the Future of Health Care in Canada, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) President and CEO Dr. Paul Garfinkel urged the Romanow Commission to ensure that the future of health care include in its core, services for people who experience mental illness and addiction.

“The reforms you are considering will have a strong impact on the patients we serve - therefore, we urge you to include our clients in your reform of medicare,” Dr. Garfinkel said. CAMH is one of the few mental health and addiction organizations presenting before the Commission.

Dr. Garfinkel provided the Commission a brief snapshot of the burden of mental illness and addiction in Canada noting, for example, that 20% percent of the general population experiences a mental illness in any given year. One in 10 adults report problems with their drinking, affecting their health and financial situations, and one in six deaths a year in Canada, or 34,700, is caused by smoking.

The economic costs of mental health and addiction problems are also significant – more than \$8 billion in lost productivity due to workers being on disability or due to premature death in 1998 alone according to Health Canada. Substance abuse cost the Canadian economy more than \$18 billion in 1992.

While Dr. Garfinkel expressed strong support of the Commission’s mandate and the direction the Commissioner is heading, he had nine recommendations to improve Canada’s health care system and services for clients with mental health and addiction problems. These were:

- Include mental health and addiction in the definition of health and illness
- Take a broad view of the policy levers that will improve health –consider social support, housing, income, employment and self-help advocacy in health reform initiatives
- Include health promotion in health reform efforts
- Expand public coverage under the *Canada Health Act*
- Speed up primary care reform and include mental health and substance abuse
- Improve health human resource planning
- Forget about increased private financing – Services to people with addiction and mental illness are already vulnerable and private financing would create an additional impediment for those needing care.
- Invest in research
- Put citizens at the centre of a reformed health care system

CAMH, a teaching hospital and research facility recognized as a Centre of Excellence by the World Health Organization is located in Toronto and is the largest mental health and addiction facility in Canada. CAMH runs clinical programs, supports communities in health promotion and prevention programs, works with government on policy development and resource allocation and strives towards eliminating the stigma associated with mental illness and addiction.

Dr. Garfinkel's remarks and the CAMH submission to the Commission on the Future of Health Care are available at www.camh.net

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