



**CANADIAN MENTAL  
HEALTH ASSOCIATION, ONTARIO**  

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# Mental Illness & Chronic Disease Prevention: Opportunities & Challenges

CDPAC National Conference  
November 2008

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# Four areas to explore

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1. Mental illnesses can be perceived as chronic illnesses
2. Poor mental health is a risk factor for chronic physical conditions
3. People with chronic physical conditions are at risk of developing mental health problems
4. People with serious mental illness frequently have co-existing chronic physical conditions

# Are mental illnesses chronic diseases?

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- Chronic disease literature includes mental illnesses as chronic diseases
- However, in mental health field, serious mental illnesses are not framed in terms of chronicity or management but in terms of recovery
- So is a CDPM approach appropriate for people with serious mental illnesses?
- CMHA Ontario has some concerns but also sees some opportunities

# Depression

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- The most common mental health problem
- Can be mild, moderate or serious
- One of the top 10 chronic conditions in Ontario
- Under-recognized in primary care
- Evidence that CDPM approach improves depression treatment

***Opportunity: CDPM approach in primary care can improve the prevention, detection and treatment of depression.***

# Why does it work?

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- Structured diagnostic assessment
- Care plan
- Evidence-based treatment protocols
- Multidisciplinary team
- Psychiatric consults/visits
- Relapse prevention planning
- Education and support for people experiencing depression to manage their own mental health
- Proactive follow-up and monitoring
- Client information systems
- Ongoing training for providers

# Risks of a CDPM orientation for serious mental illness

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## SMI used to be seen as a chronic condition

- People defined by their illness
- Perceived as chronically disabled
- “Treatment” and “management” of illness/symptoms was the focus
- Consumers fought hard to move from “chronicity” to “recovery”

1. How are serious mental illnesses different from chronic physical conditions?
2. Is recovery compatible with “prevention and management”?

## How are mental illnesses different from chronic physical conditions?

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### Many serious mental illnesses are different

- Early onset and episodic nature of illness
  - ⇒ Disrupts education, employment, relationships
  - ⇒ Disempowerment, poverty, isolation
- Recovery involves restoring all these losses,
  - + Inclusion in community life
  - + Self-determination
  - + Improved mental health

# Recovery & CDPM

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- A CDPM-oriented health system
  - can enhance health care for people with mental illness
  - can improve links between providers and other elements of life important to recovery
  - But ultimately it is focused around the health care system
- Health care is an important part of recovery but recovery is not focused around health care.

*A CDPM-oriented health system can be helpful to recovery, but alone it is not a recovery model.*

# Opportunities

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- However, the CDPM approach has the potential to improve the integration of mental and physical health care
  - ➔ Opportunity to improve **physical health** of people with **mental illness**
  - ➔ And to improve the **mental health** of people with **chronic physical conditions**

# SMI and chronic disease

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- Schizophrenia, depression increase risk of diabetes
- People with SMI more likely to develop arrhythmia, coronary heart disease
- Depressed men: risk ischaemic heart disease
- Depressed women in Canada: greater chance of developing heart disease
- People with SMI are more likely to die from heart disease and stroke

## Why does SMI increase risk for heart disease and diabetes?

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1. High rates of smoking in people with SMI
2. Poor nutrition, lack of exercise
3. Medications can induce metabolic syndrome/obesity
4. Poverty affects motivation/capacity to exercise and eat well
5. Stigma
6. Poor access to health care = late intervention
7. Illness - direct links to diabetes?

## Physical health of people with serious mental illness

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- difficulty accessing primary health care
- poor physical health
- high risk for chronic physical conditions

***Opportunity: CDPM approach could include strategies to both prevent and manage physical chronic conditions in people with serious mental illness.***

# CDPM and physical health of people with SMI

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CDPM could:

- Improve access to primary health care
- Integrate mental and physical health care
  - Multidisciplinary teams, strong links with community mental health services and specialists
- Include prevention strategies designed for people with SMI:
  - That recognize role of poverty, stigma, illness, medications

## People with chronic conditions are at risk of mental health problems

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- People with chronic conditions: 3X more likely to have a mental health problem
- Lower perception of overall mental health
- Heart disease, stroke, obesity, diabetes increase risk of depression
- arthritis/rheumatism, asthma, migraines, thyroid conditions, respiratory illnesses, cancers and multiple sclerosis associated with higher rates of depression

# Impact of Depression on Chronic Conditions

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- People with chronic physical conditions are at higher risk of depression
  - Often not recognized
  - Reduces motivation for self-care
  - Leads to poorer physical health outcomes

***Opportunity: Incorporate prevention and management strategies to address the co-existence of depression in people with physical chronic conditions.***

# CDPM and Depression in People with Chronic Conditions

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## CDPM could

- Integrate depression prevention in care
- Involve regular screening as part of care
- Create self-help and support groups for people with the same chronic condition
- Provide depression education and self-management support (CMHA BC's program)

## CDPM: An opportunity to address socio-economic factors that affect health?

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- Income, employment and housing - important part of recovery from mental illness
- Poverty is an underlying risk factor for CD
- CDPM model includes creating supportive communities that take action and create healthy public policy
- So a CDPM oriented system can potentially take action on these common socio—economic issues that affect mental health, mental illness and physical health

***Opportunity: Address preventable risk factors for mental illnesses and chronic physical conditions through cross-sectoral collaboration.***

# Opportunities for Mental Health: a summary

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- Improve depression prevention and treatment
- Improve physical health of people with serious mental illness
- Prevent and manage chronic physical conditions in people with mental illness
- Prevent and treat mental health problems in people with chronic conditions
- Coordinated action on socio-economic factors that affect mental and physical health

# Questions for Discussion

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- Is your province/region addressing mental health and/or mental illness as part of its chronic disease strategy?
- What is your experience with co-existing mental illness and chronic physical illnesses?
- What opportunities do you see for addressing mental health, mental illness and physical chronic conditions?
- What do you think about framing mental illnesses as chronic diseases? Is there a danger? An opportunity?