

OCDPA's Messages to Address Mental Health

The OCDPA encourages the dissemination, promotion, and integration of OCDPA messages to ensure consistent communication to promote positive mental health. Depending on the purpose, please incorporate and/or use the information provided below:

1. For Actions at the Individual Level:

Provide individuals with information to help them maintain good mental health, recognize mental health problems and get support.

- For example, the Canadian Mental Health Association's "Now More than Ever... Invest in Yourself" document, available: http://cmha.ca/MHW2009/assets/CMHA_Brochure_FULL_Web.pdf

2. To Influence System Level Change:

Create the conditions necessary for good mental health:

- Address the socioeconomic conditions which promote positive mental health: social inclusion, freedom from discrimination/violence and access to economic resources.
- Improve people's understanding and ability to maintain good mental health, recognize mental health problems and get support.
- Increase availability and access to depression screening and early intervention.
- Reduce the stigma associated with mental illness.

Evidence Supporting OCDPA's Messages

1. Individual Level

Message: Provide individuals with information to help them maintain good mental health, recognize mental health problems and get support.

People's knowledge, beliefs and attitudes concerning mental health are essential dimensions of help-seeking. If people do not recognize the signs and symptoms of depression or anxiety they likely will not seek appropriate help. The Canadian Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health (2008) has developed a national framework for mental health literacy to enhance the knowledge and skills that enable Canadians to access, understand and use information to promote positive mental health.

Efforts to promote positive mental health at the individual level focus on developing personal skills, strengths and resiliency (CIHI, 2009). This approach supports personal and social development and increases the options available to people to exercise greater control over their own health and their environments (Jane-Llopis et al., 2005).

2. System Level

Message: Address the socioeconomic conditions which promote mental health: social inclusion, freedom from discrimination/violence and access to economic resources.

Social inclusion, freedom from discrimination and violence, and access to economic resources are the three most significant factors contributing to positive mental health (Keleher and Armstrong, 2006; CMHA Ont et al., 2008).

A socially inclusive society is one where all people are valued, differences are respected and basic needs are met. A socially inclusive society allows people to live in dignity and participate in the social, economic, political and cultural systems in Ontario. Structured opportunities for participation and volunteerism, physical activity, arts and cultural programs, healthy workplace, school programs, and strategies that foster social networks have been effective in increasing social inclusion and promoting positive mental health (VicHealth, 2005; Policy Research Initiative, 2005).

Discrimination and violence are risk factors for poor mental health. Racial discrimination is associated with low self-esteem and loss of sense of control, major depression, anxiety disorder, and psychological distress (VicHealth, 2007). Women who are exposed to violence are also at greater risk of poor mental health (WHO, 2000). Effective interventions include anti-bullying strategies, anti-discrimination programs and policies in schools and workplaces. Also effective are initiatives that focus on at-risk populations who may be perpetrators or victims of discrimination and violence (VicHealth, 2007).

Access to economic resources such as housing, education, work, and income impact a person's socio-economic status, social connectedness and personal sense of control (Mulvihill, Mailoux & Atkin, 2001). Low levels of education or outdated job skills can trap people in low-income jobs that perpetuate the cycle of poverty and block access to resources. The stress and strain resulting from a lack of resources can lead to depression and anxiety (Eaton & Muntaner, 1999). Evidence-based interventions to increase economic participation include adult literacy programs, job training and employment programs for youth, new Canadians and people with disabilities, high quality affordable childcare, and safe affordable housing (CMHA et al., 2009; VicHealth, 2007).

Message: Improve people's understanding and ability to maintain good mental health, recognize mental health problems and get support.

Mental health and well-being is key for individuals, populations and societies to function well (Williams et al., 2005). Promoting positive mental health involves building and supporting individual resilience, creating supportive environments, and influencing the broader determinants of mental health. Canadians are aware of some of the personal actions that can promote positive mental health; such as stress reduction, social support and physical activity. To this end, it is important that mental health promotion strategies and activities apply to all people, including at-risk individuals and people living with mental or physical illnesses (CIHI, 2009).

Culture influences the way that mental health problems are experienced and recognized (CAMH, 2007). Mental health literacy needs to incorporate diverse societal attitudes and beliefs regarding mental health and mental illness in order to be meaningful. Initiatives can then be implemented that seek to improve people's understanding and ability to recognize, and promote positive mental health (CAMIMH, 2007a). This includes fostering the capacity for collective action on the social determinants of mental health.

Ensuring appropriate services and supports are accessible when people seek them is an important component in promoting positive mental health.

Message: Increase availability and access to depression screening and early intervention.

The Canadian Task Force on Preventive Health Care (MacMillan et al., 2005) recommends routine screening in primary health care settings for depression in adults. However, screening on its own has little benefit unless there is appropriate diagnosis and treatment available as follow-up (MacMillan et al., 2005; U.S. Preventive Services Task Force, 2009). Screening programs that include access to mental health care or case management have been particularly effective in reducing the symptoms of depression (MacMillan et al., 2005).

Early intervention in mental health problems should also focus on treatment and support for individuals who present with poor mental health, but whose symptoms fall below clinical thresholds for mental disorders. Moreover, people who present in distress may be inadequately served if there is lack of attention given to addressing the social, economic, occupational and physical issues they also face (Middleton & Shaw, 2000).

Message: Reduce the stigma associated with mental illness.

Canadians generally have a fairly good understanding of the early signs of mental illness and are able to recognize mental disorders. However, only one in three Canadians who display symptoms of an anxiety or mood disorder seeks professional help (Government of Canada, 2006). Fears of negative repercussions from a diagnosis of mental illness are key barriers to people seeking help (CAMIMH, 2007b; CAMIMH, 2008; Everett, 2006). Recent surveys show that many Canadians feel reluctant to speak with their family members, employers or health care professionals about their mental health (CAMIMH, 2007b; CMA, 2008).

The impact of stigma on help-seeking behaviour varies across population groups (Golbertstein et al., 2008). Emerging evidence suggests that stigma may delay younger individuals (Golberstein et al., 2008) and adults (McNair et al., 2002) from seeking care, or from adhering to treatment plans (Sirey et al., 2001).

The Mental Health Commission of Canada is initially targeting health care professionals and youth as priorities in the launch of its anti-discrimination and stigma campaign: Opening Minds.