



## Issue #1

### Talking About Mental Health

The burden of mental illness and addiction is 1.5 times that of all cancers, and more than seven times the cost of all infectious diseases.<sup>1</sup> No matter what our age, cultural background or income bracket, at least one in five of us will experience a mental illness in our lifetime. If mental illness is so prevalent, then why do so many people suffer in silence? It's time to start talking.



According to the World Health Organization, health is “a state of complete physical, mental, and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.” Yet so many people simply define good health as being physically well. Our mental health is equally important but often does not get the attention it should — and that's costing us all. Mental health problems cost Canada at least \$50 billion a year, not including the costs to the criminal justice system or the child welfare system.<sup>2</sup>

#### What is mental illness?

Our psychological health has a profound effect on how we feel, perceive, think, communicate, and understand the world around us. When we are mentally unwell, we experience alterations in thinking, mood or behaviour, and that causes distress and impairs how we function in life. There are many types of mental illness, but the most common include:

- Anxiety disorders
- Mood disorders
- Eating disorders
- Schizophrenia
- Personality disorders
- Substance use disorders (commonly called addictions)

#### Warning Signs of Mental Illness

Each mental illness has its own characteristic symptoms, however, there are some general warning signs that might alert you that someone may need professional help. Some of these include:

- marked personality change
- extreme mood swings
- excessive anxieties
- prolonged depression
- inability to cope with minor problems and daily activities
- loss of interest in hobbies and social activities
- strange or grandiose ideas, delusions, or hallucinations
- problems thinking clearly
- significant changes in eating or sleeping patterns
- thinking or talking about suicide
- abuse of alcohol or drugs
- excessive anger, hostility, or violent behaviour



### Supporting someone with a mental illness

Family and social support is vital for someone dealing with a mental illness. You can help by:

- **Become informed.** To better understand what your friend or family member is dealing with you need as much information as possible. Contact your Employee and Family Assistance program.
- **Ask what you can do.** Don't guess or assume. Ask the person what you can do to help. Mental illness sometimes makes it difficult for people to communicate.
- **Listen.** It takes courage for someone to open up about their mental health challenges. Sometimes the most important thing you can do is listen.
- **Don't blame or judge.** Judgement can be the one thing that someone with a mental health issue fears the most.
- **Guide the person to appropriate support(s).** Your Employee and Family Assistance program can provide you with a number of options in your area. Offer to make calls, find information, or drive the individual to appointments.
- **Be optimistic.** Reassure the person that what they are experiencing is a medical issue and that they will get better with the time, treatment, and support.
- **Take care of yourself.** Supporting anyone with a physical or mental illness can be an emotionally draining situation. Protect your own physical and emotional health.

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1. Globe and Mail - May 22, 2015- "The case for publicly funded therapy".  
2. Globe and Mail - May 22, 2015- "The case for publicly funded therapy".

 Send us your questions, comments, and suggestions—[lifelines@homewoodhealth.com](mailto:lifelines@homewoodhealth.com)

For more information, to arrange a counselling session, or to access any of your EFAP services, please contact a Client Services Representative. We are ready to speak with you 24 hours a day, seven days a week, in English or French. All calls are completely confidential.

1.800.663.1142

1.866.398.9505 (**Numéro sans frais - en français**)

1.888.384.1152 (**TTY**)

604.689.1717 **International (Call Collect)**

