

For immediate release

September 27, 2007

Successful Symposium held on Child and Youth Mental Health

Stakeholders from across the country gathered to develop a national perspective

OTTAWA - The *National Invitational Symposium on Child and Youth Mental Health* was held over two days in Toronto and stakeholders from all across the country gathered to discuss the steps necessary to develop a national perspective on the key issues pertaining to child and youth mental health. The stakeholders also articulated views on the establishment of a Canadian child and youth mental health strategy.

"Everyone in attendance fully supports a national approach to a mental health strategy", said Peter Dudding, Executive Director of the Child Welfare League of Canada and one of the co-hosts of the Symposium. "We are all too aware that Canada is the only G8 country without a national plan. When 15% of our children and youth are living with mental illness and there are serious gaps in services, we need to do something."

The Symposium was the first opportunity to bring together interested parties, representing different areas of child and youth mental health, from across Canada and sharing in a common vision of the holistic health and well-being needs of young people with a commitment to putting such a vision into action. Another goal was to gain a better understanding of the current programs, research, activities and planning in provinces and territories that will better inform the national perspective.

The Honourable Michael Kirby, former Senator and Chair of the Mental Health Commission of Canada, was the evening's guest speaker. Mr. Kirby discussed his vision and plans for the Commission and highlighted some of the recent appointments to the Advisory Committees, many of whom currently live with, or have family and friends living with mental illnesses. He noted the importance of including their voices in the development of the Commission's strategies.

Child and youth mental health was recently identified as a key priority of the Mental Health Commission, a welcome announcement for the 1.2 million young Canadians afflicted with anxiety, attention deficit, depression, addiction and other disorders.

Dr Stan Kutcher, Sun Life Financial Chair in Adolescent Mental Health at Dalhousie University, kicked off the event as the keynote speaker. Dr Kutcher emphasized Canada's legal obligations, through the *Canada Health Act* and the *Declaration on the Rights of the Child*, to provide health services to its citizens. He also discussed the advances in comprehending the complexities of child and adolescent mental health problems.

The Child Welfare League of Canada (CWLC); the Public Health Agency of Canada; the Provincial Center of Excellence on Child and Youth Mental Health at CHEO; the Canadian Association of Paediatric Health Centres; and the Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research were the co-hosts of the *National Invitational Symposium on Child and Youth Mental Health*.

CWLC is a membership based national organization dedicated to promoting the well-being and protection of vulnerable young people (0-18 years). CWLC plays a significant role in promoting best practices among those in the field of child welfare, child rights, children and youth mental health and youth justice.

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