

Name  
Address  
Phone number

Date

Dear Candidate:

Canadians with serious mental illnesses along with their families and friends need your support.

There are two main issues of concern that fall under federal jurisdiction and have a major impact on the well-being of people with schizophrenia, bipolar disorder and major depression:

1. Establishing the National Mental Commission in Canada approved by the federal government in December 2005.
2. Timely access to new and innovative medications and services.

Please take time to read the key issues in the attached document and advise me of your party's position so that my family and I can make an informed choice on Election Day.

I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

## WHY CANDIDATES SHOULD BE CONCERNED ABOUT MENTAL ILLNESS

### *Schizophrenia, bipolar disorder and major depression are life threatening illnesses*

- Severe mental illness affects approximately 2.8% of our population.
- Untreated mental illness is the leading cause of disability and suicide.
- The annual cost of mental illness in Canada exceeds \$15 billion.
- Many individuals are unable to work and live in poverty.
- Untreated mental illness interrupts educational achievement and 50% of the children with emotional and behavioural disturbances drop out of school.
- Persons experiencing psychosis usually suffer tremendous distress and may engage in actions that are dangerous to themselves and others.
- An estimated 10 to 20% of the prison population and an estimated 40 to 50% of our homeless population has a mental illness.
- An estimated 10% to 20% will take their own lives.
- Suicide attempts account for an estimated 160,000 hospital days annually.

**Do you support the recently announced federal plan to establish a Canadian Mental Health Commission and its mandate to: (i) Make mental health a priority in Canada; (ii) Reduce the fragmentation of mental health policies across the country; and (iii) Develop strategies to reduce the stigma associated with mental illness?**

Mental health care in Canada is severely fragmented. A patchwork of policies across the country results in lack of treatment, lack of support and lack of access to services in many jurisdictions.

The Senate Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology has spent considerable time and resources investigating mental health care across the country to identify needs and improvements. One of its key recommendations, accepted by the federal government in December 2005, was the creation of a **Canadian Mental Health Commission**. The federal government must take a leadership role to establish a national mental health action plan to ensure all individuals with serious mental illnesses have equal access to effective and efficient treatment, rehabilitation and support programs.

YES? NO? / COMMENT

**Do you support the right of all individuals living with mental illnesses to have timely and cost-effective access to new and innovative psychiatric medications?**

Timely use of the most effective drug therapies can result in fewer relapses and hospitalizations, reduced risk of suicide, reduced disability and reduced family and relationship disruptions.

The federal evaluation and approval process for drugs must be streamlined to ensure timely access to new and innovative treatments. The federal government also needs to work with provincial and territorial governments to facilitate the inclusion of psychiatric medications on provincial drug formularies.

YES? NO? / COMMENT