



**Mood Disorders** Society of Canada

La Société Pour **Les Troubles de L'Humeur** du Canada

-FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE-

### **Pan-Canadian Survey Raises Warning Signs on Mental Health Services**

**Guelph, August 4, 2015** — The Canadian healthcare system continues to critically underperform for individuals with mental illness, according to Mood Disorders Society of Canada's (MDSC) pan-Canadian survey of the country's mental health community. The survey, conducted between June 16<sup>th</sup> and June 27<sup>th</sup>, 2015 received a remarkable 2,245 responses.

**Dave Gallson, Associate National Executive Director, MDSC** states, *"These survey results reinforce that while there have been some improvements across various federal and provincial mental healthcare systems, there are many areas where changes are desperately needed. What has been made abundantly clear by respondents is that significant gaps and shortages in community mental healthcare continue to be ignored and dedicated investments in mental health services remain a strong priority for Canadians."*

Link to the full report is now available here: [www.mdsc.ca](http://www.mdsc.ca)

#### **Some key findings:**

- **Of the top two priorities suggested for government action, a total of 91% of respondents indicated that increasing access to mental healthcare professionals**, (e.g. psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, etc.) was a top priority, while 88% reported a need to focus on **increasing community mental health services**.
- When asked directly, **38% of respondents indicated that the time between initial help seeking and diagnosis exceeded a period of 12 months**. Retrospectively, following a similar 2011 MDSC national mental health survey, it was reported that a total of 35% of the respondents indicated having to wait more than 12 months for a diagnosis. These comparative results show that our performance on diagnosis has not improved. Comments received indicated a shortage of professionals available to diagnose and treat individuals with mental health issues.
- **Experience with Mental Illness:** The majority of individuals had been dealing with mental illness for more than ten years, either first-hand or through provision of care for someone experiencing mental illness.
- **Mental Health Care System in Canada:** Canada's mental healthcare system is perceived to need substantial improvements. The provision of adequate, appropriate, and timely services to support individuals with mental illness as well as their family members, caregivers, and even healthcare professionals is generally considered to be lacking and ineffective, making them critical areas for government attention.

- Of great concern is the finding that **one-third of those with an undiagnosed mental illness ignored their condition, or self-medicated.**
- **Health Coverage:** While the majority of those surveyed had both provincial and private health coverage, more than half believed their coverage was inadequate, including a greater proportion of those with an undiagnosed mental illness. Additionally, those with provincial health coverage alone were more likely than their counterparts to face cost barriers to treatment. Across survey results, several key factors were found to influence perceptions and experience of care, including health coverage, cost barriers, receipt of a diagnosis and age.
- Coping strategies for those dealing with an undiagnosed mental illness varied across age groups. Specifically, **younger individuals were more likely to ignore/deny evidence and existence of their mental illness**, while middle-aged individuals were more likely to self-medicate and older individuals more likely to rely on friends and family for support. These findings suggest a need for greater access to support services, particularly for youth who are more inclined to engage in maladaptive behaviours to manage undiagnosed mental illness.
- **Overall Perceptions:** Above all, perceptions were largely positive regarding availability of community mental health organizations and the overall treatment of mental illness through family doctors and other healthcare professionals. However, the availability of healthcare professionals as well as care provided through walk-in clinics and hospital emergency rooms warranted further attention. Moving forward, efforts to improve the overall treatment of patients with mental illness in all healthcare forums should be focused around:
  - The degree of respect and empathy demonstrated by staff;
  - Addressing perceived lack of prioritization for mental health patients;
  - Reducing wait times; and
  - Addressing reports of being rushed among healthcare providers during patient consultations.

### **Moving Forward**

Results of this national survey clearly illustrate that Canadians are calling for immediate action and change on systemic issues identified in Canada's mental healthcare system. The issues highlighted in this report are considered to be critical areas for government to focus on, with particular emphasis on increasing access to mental healthcare professionals across Canada.

### **About Mood Disorders Society of Canada**

Mood Disorders Society of Canada (MDSC) is a national, not-for-profit, consumer-driven, voluntary health charity committed to ensuring that the voices of consumers, family members and caregivers are heard on issues relating to mental health and mental illness; and in particular with regard to depression, bipolar illness and other associated mood disorders.

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