



Thinking big, aiming high and acting boldly: mental health innovation and the economy

Opening Remarks to the Standing House Committee on Finance

Delivered by Phil Upshall on behalf of the Mood Disorder Society of Canada, the University of British Columbia and the University of Alberta (APEC Digital Hub at UBC)

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Mr. Chair, Members, on behalf of the Mood Disorders Society of Canada, the University of British Columbia, and the University of Alberta, thank you for inviting me to speak about the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Digital Hub at UBC.

We know the facts far too well. One in five Canadians suffer from a mental health problem or illness in their lifetime, and many more are affected indirectly through a family member, close friend, or colleague. The economic cost is \$50 billion a year. We know from research that health care, social services and income-support costs comprise the biggest proportion of this expenditure. Billions in productivity are lost every single year. Over the next three decades mental illness will cost Canada's economy more than \$2.5 trillion.

We urgently need to bring innovative solutions to this ever-escalating issue. Last November, thanks to our global leadership in this area, the APEC forum chose Canada to do just that.

In collaboration with MDSC and U of A, UBC will host the APEC Digital Hub for mental health innovation. This new international epicentre for the promotion and development of advanced research from some of the world's leading universities and health institutes involved in the diagnosis, treatment and public awareness of mental disorders will be a game changer in addressing mental illness while contributing to Canada's economic growth.

As the centrepiece of APEC's intergovernmental mental health initiatives, the Hub will be an incubator of new ideas and practices. It is a practical resource for Canada and the APEC economies that will not only target the intergovernmental aspects at a high level public policy stage, but also at the regional level when it comes to program and service delivery on mental health issues. The Hub will also play a vital role at the patient level, helping clinicians use international best practices to treat those suffering from mental illness—making the Hub an applied implementation science backbone currently lagging particularly in mental health. In practical terms, this means the Hub provides needed leadership to Canadians and 2.8 billion people in the 21 APEC economies to address the urgent global health care crisis in innovative



and unique ways. This is done through international partnerships, clusters and scientific research and development.

This government said it best in its innovation agenda:

“Canada needs to focus on developing world-leading clusters in areas where it has the potential to be, or is already known as, a hotbed of innovation. The goal is to make significant targeted investments in these clusters so that Canada can attract the best ideas, brightest talent and smart capital necessary for success.”

We agree wholeheartedly.

As we embark on a milestone year for our country, we believe the Government of Canada is well positioned to lead in science, digital innovation and the fight for mental wellness by investing \$5 million over five years into the Hub.

An initial financial contribution from our government of \$1 million per year would signal to the world that Canada is, indeed, leading the way: making digital and science innovation in mental health a top priority, and tackling a \$50-billion problem here at home and creating solutions that are first and foremost based on the needs of Canadians.

Canada’s work will feature prominently at November’s APEC meetings in Peru, where leaders will meet to discuss their core areas of interest, including mental health as a global priority.

In Canada’s 150th year, we can proudly demonstrate our leadership in economic growth through our investments in digital innovation. And we can be a catalyst for scientific discoveries that will be shared - and reciprocated - among APEC economies.

In a world of inescapable digital connection, intergovernmental collaborations and public-private partnerships are key to overcoming obstacles to mental wellness. To date, more than 100 government agencies, industry and academic organizations are committed to the Hub’s efforts.

These include creating an interactive platform to build awareness, develop customized curricula, share information and experiences, and identify and implement best practices in research and treatment.

It is knowledge: amplified—shared between continents, nations, regions, communities and individuals. Communities across our country would be meeting the needs of Canadians first.

Like Canada, the APEC economies have urban, rural, remote and indigenous communities with different levels of access to technology—and different mental health resources.



Through the Digital Hub, scientists, researchers, businesses and governments can use data related to their specific demographics and geographies to develop their own models, innovations and discoveries in the field of mental health.

In a recent address at the Public Policy Forum Minister Navdeep Bains reiterated the importance of innovation as a Canadian value. He said, in part:

"The government is prepared to think big, aim high and act boldly to drive economic growth through innovation. Our government has a plan to create the conditions for well-paying jobs for the middle class, growth across all industries and an improved quality of life for all Canadians. With this plan, Canada can outperform the rest of the world."

The Digital Hub is a perfect example of accelerated economic growth and improved quality-of-life through innovation.

And as a strong partner at the APEC forum, Canada is well positioned to lead in the global fight for mental health and wellness.

At the same time - I will be blunt - the world is watching for that equally critical "diplomatic" nod of support from our host government. Canada cannot and should not carry the weight alone however: with initial seed funding from our government we expect many of these early and new supporters to follow suit. Our cluster can also work collaboratively with other research institutions across the country to maximize current investments.

In closing, world-leading clusters begin with a vision. We have it. The momentum is there. The world is watching. Our public policy dialogue could not be more aligned. We are seeking this early, initial partnership to allow us to act together as catalysts in digital and global mental health innovation. Indeed we see no better role for the Government of Canada in support of an initiative that is vital to Canada's economic growth and to our efforts to address mental health issues at home and abroad.

I am happy to answer questions and am thankful for your time today Mr. Chair and Committee members.