

## HEALTH

ADVERTISED BY MOOD DISORDERS SOCIETY OF CANADA

# Canadians with mental illness face delays and inequities in accessing medications through public drug coverage system

"Having mental health issues is not a flaw in personality, but a flaw in chemistry," says Chelsea Meldrum, third year university student living with mental illness

CELESTE CHIASSON

Chelsea Meldrum was 12 years old and feeling suicidal. She was overwhelmed by fear, crying uncontrollably, feeling lonely but unable to socialize. Experiencing emotional highs and lows and auditory hallucinations, Chelsea self-harmed frequently and repeatedly missed school.

It took several years and visits to family physicians, psychiatrists and multiple specialists to confirm Chelsea's mental illness diagnosis. For many Canadians like Chelsea living with one or more mental illnesses, medication is a critical part of their healing and recovery journey (along with peer support, psychotherapy, lifestyle changes and alternative therapies).

"Each year, one in five Canadians are affected by mental illness. When faced with this challenge, all Canadians deserve to have swift and equal access to the medications they may need to recover their wellness," says Ken Porter, National Program Manager at Mood Disorders Society of Canada.

But many Canadians don't. "Research has shown that up to 90 per cent of Canadians with serious mental illness are unemployed leaving them to rely on publicly funded medication if they are not covered by private or workplace insurance plans."

## REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- **More than 50% negative:** more than half of the reimbursement recommendations for new medications for mental illness made by Canada's assessment bodies were negative (Quebec: 62%, Rest of Canada: 54%), compared to only 17% negative recommendations for new medications for other non-oncology disorders during the same 10-year period.
- **Time delays:** the average time from Health Canada approval to public reimbursement was 949 days or just over 2.5 years after the medication was approved for Canadians.
- **Provincial disparity:** the vast majority of new medications assessed for this report are not equitably accessible through public drug plans across the country or are not accessible at all.

Mood Disorders Society of Canada commissioned a new report, **System Broken: How Public Drug Coverage is Failing Canadians with Mental Illness**, which reveals the stark reality that public access to newer medications for mental illness is hampered by a complex system that takes too long and results in inequitable access – or in many cases, no access at all. The report revealed substantial delays and a significantly higher rate of negative reimburse-



Chelsea Meldrum openly shares her personal experience with mental illness to reduce stigma and help others in need. PHOTO: HYUNGCHEOL PARK

“ALL CANADIANS DESERVE TO HAVE SWIFT AND EQUAL ACCESS TO THE MEDICATIONS THEY MAY NEED TO RECOVER THEIR WELLNESS,” SAYS KEN PORTER, NATIONAL PROGRAM MANAGER AT MOOD DISORDERS SOCIETY OF CANADA

ment recommendations for mental illness medications compared to medications for other, non-oncology medical disorders.

"If medication is a part of someone's recovery journey, they need to be able to get any and all medica-

tions that work for them," explains Dr. Diane McIntosh, a Community Psychiatrist and Clinical Assistant Professor at The University of British Columbia. "Today's barriers are leaving the lives of many Canadians with mental illness at risk."

Today, Chelsea is living life on her own terms: she is in her third year of university, and in her spare time enjoys painting and caring for her cat and two dogs. Managing her array of symptoms is still a constant battle and requires a combination of exercise, sleep, medication and talk therapy.

"I consider myself very fortunate to have a supportive family and access to care, including private healthcare coverage, which includes a drug plan that gives me access to the newer, improved drugs to treat my mental illnesses," says Chelsea.

She openly shares her personal experience with mental illness to reduce stigma and help others in need.

Mood Disorders Society of Canada is asking government decision makers, health ministers, and all stakeholders to work collaboratively to reduce the long administrative delays and roadblocks to medication access for people living with all types of mental illnesses today.

For more information on how you can support this goal, please visit [accessmedication.mdsoc.ca](https://www.mdsoc.ca).

## MOOD DISORDERS SOCIETY OF CANADA (MDSC)

MDSC is a national, not-for-profit, voluntary health charity committed to ensuring that the voices of persons impacted by mental illness, family members and caregivers are heard on issues relating to mental health and mental illness, and in particular with regards to depression, bipolar illness, and other associated mood disorders. MDSC has evolved to become one of Canada's best-connected mental health non-government organizations (NGOs) with a demonstrated track record for forging and maintaining meaningful and sustained partnerships with the public, private, and non-profit sectors throughout Canada. Visit [MDSC.ca](https://www.mdsoc.ca)

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Head of Canada Silver Road Capital Group

**Monday, November 20, 2023**

6:30 pm to 9:00 pm

Toronto, Ontario

Location to Announced

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