



Mood Disorders Society of Canada
Société pour **les troubles de l'humeur** du Canada

**Written Submission for the Pre-Budget Consultations in
Advance of the 2026 Budget
Submitted by Mood Disorders Society of Canada**

Summary of Recommendations

Recommendation 1: That the Government of Canada establish a dedicated, multi-year federal funding stream to strengthen the capacity of community-based mental health organizations across Canada.

Recommendation 2: That the Government of Canada invest \$4.2 million over 3 years to implement and scale the STRIDE Forward program.

Recommendation 3: That the Government of Canada embed community mental health support into the men's health strategy.

Mental Health at the Core of Building a Stronger and Healthier Canada

Canada faces a mental illness and substance use crisis, straining individuals, communities, and our health care system. By the time we reach 40 years of age, 1 in 2 of us will have had or have a mental illness.¹²

The impacts of this crisis are felt acutely across vulnerable demographics. Suicide is the second leading cause of death for youth and young adults (aged 15-34)³, with 20% of children and youth visits to emergency departments for mental health disorders leading to hospital admissions.⁴ 54% of Canada's Veterans will experience at least one mental health disorder, including depression, PTSD, or anxiety.⁵

Beyond the human toll, the mental illness crisis is fundamentally an economic issue. Problems related to poor mental health impose an economic burden estimated at over \$220 billion annually in Canada, which encompasses health care costs and significant losses in productivity. With 60% of Canadians actively involved in the labour force, approximately 70% report that their work experience directly impacts their mental health.⁶ As a leading cause of disability in the country, poor mental health accounts for 62% of missed workdays, resulting in an average of 12 lost days per employee every year⁷.

Investing in mental health is no longer just a health care priority; it is a sound social and economic policy. Accessible and affordable mental health care provides individual stability while bolstering entire communities, contributing to a stronger, more resilient workforce, and reducing heavy pressures on Canada's social safety nets.

To address these interconnected crises, the Government of Canada needs proven, community-rooted partners. For over twenty years, Mood Disorders Society of Canada (MDSC) has been a national leader in advancing mental health, advocacy, and research. MDSC is established and led by people with lived and living experience (PWLE), ensuring that our programs are grounded in reality and deeply trusted by the communities we serve.

Together, we can build a more resilient, compassionate and inclusive Canada, where lived experience drives innovation and every individual has the opportunity to thrive.

Recommendations for the Government of Canada

Recommendation 1:

That the Government of Canada establish a dedicated, multi-year federal funding stream to strengthen the capacity of community-based mental health organizations across Canada.

The Challenge:

Mental illness costs Canada over \$220 billion a year in health care and lost productivity. Our hospitals and emergency rooms are stretched thin, with wait times for psychiatrists and psychologists often stretching a year or more. Community mental health organizations act as the frontline—offering timely, low-barrier support that keeps people stable and out of crisis. Yet these groups are underfunded and working in silos, struggling to keep up. One-third of Canadians say their mental health needs go unmet, hitting workforce participation and community well-being hard.

The Solution:

We recommend that the Government of Canada invest in targeted, multi-year capacity building for community mental health organizations. Mirroring successful federal funding models⁸ used to build capacity in national women's organizations, this dedicated stream will allow the community mental health sector to:

- **Advance Systemic Change** by supporting research, advocacy, and lived-experience-led programs that tackle mental health inequities.
- **Strengthen Sector Coordination** through pan-Canadian projects that cut fragmentation, share proven tools, ease pressure on emergency care, and improve access in rural and underserved areas.
- **Drive Economic Prosperity** with accessible supports that cut absenteeism, keep Canadians working, and build a more inclusive workforce.

This is smart economics: stable people, stronger communities, less strain on the system.

Recommendation 2:

Invest \$4.2 million over 3 years to implement and scale the STRIDE Forward⁹ program to support vulnerable Canadians into employment.

The Challenge: The Intersecting Crises of Mental Illness, Addictions, and Housing

There is a critical "missing piece" in current community reintegration strategies: the lack of in-depth employment skills development coupled with long-term employer partnerships. National data confirms that 74% of people experiencing homelessness report mental health or substance use issues, with nearly half living with both concurrently.¹⁰ Without targeted, structured interventions, these individuals remain trapped in a cycle between shelters, emergency

departments, and the justice system—at a staggering public cost of \$66,000 to \$120,000 per person annually.¹¹

The Solution: STRIDE Forward

To fill this gap, the federal government should invest **\$4.2 million** over **3 years** to enable MDSC to launch STRIDE Forward in high-need communities such as Moncton, NB, and Belleville, ON. This continuous-intake program will equip 360 vulnerable Canadians with the skills for lasting employment and community reintegration.

STRIDE Forward is an intensive 8-week program (35 hours per week) tailored for people navigating mental health challenges, housing and employment instability, and substance use recovery. It offers a structured, supportive path from crisis to stable employment or community involvement, with focused areas like stability rebuilding, mental health and peer support, professional skills, and ongoing job connections.

High Return on Investment and Proven Organizational Capacity

STRIDE Forward delivers real results at a fraction of the ongoing costs of emergency supports for unhoused individuals. MDSC's track record of delivering similar programs with strong employment outcomes ensures we can scale this effectively in high-need communities.

STRIDE Forward updates a proven MDSC employment model that helped people return to work or school across Canada. MDSC's leadership built and scaled these programs successfully before, giving us the partnerships to connect graduates directly to opportunities. By funding STRIDE Forward, the government can provide the crucial impetus needed to empower vulnerable Canadians to become productive, tax-paying members of the workforce.

Recommendation 3:

That the Government of Canada embed community mental health support into the men's health strategy.

The Challenge: Social Isolation and Help-Avoidance Among Men

Despite high rates of mental illness across Canada, men face steep barriers to care. A Canadian Men's Health Foundation survey shows 50% of men are at risk of social isolation, and 67% have never sought professional mental health support.¹²

Young men aged 19–29 are hit hardest by this isolation and reluctance to reach out. With mental illness often starting in young adulthood, it's a major vulnerability, especially since men account for about 75% of Canada's 4,000 annual suicides.¹³ Even when they try, long waits and confusing navigation leave them without timely help.

The Solution: Community-Led Interventions

To effectively reach men—particularly young men who may be reluctant to seek traditional clinical care—the federal government’s men’s health strategy must integrate community-rooted support and innovative technology.

The government should:

- **Fund Collaborative Community Projects:** Support multi-region projects led by community organizations that specialize in delivering low-barrier, peer-informed interventions tailored to men.
- **Expand Youth-Friendly Digital Tools:** Invest in digital mental health and counselling tools that reduce wait times, increase accessibility, and empower men to seek support reliably. MDSC is uniquely positioned to support this strategy through the deployment of trustworthy, dependable resources like [MIRA](#), an AI-driven mental health information resource assistant. MIRA is a sophisticated Artificial Intelligence (AI) chatbot and resource database designed specifically to help Canadians navigate the fragmented mental health system and combat widespread online misinformation. Since August 19, 2025, MIRA has had 67,000 conversations and provided 43,000 resources to users.

By partnering with community organizations like MDSC, the government can provide low-cost, high-impact interventions. This approach directly supports significantly improving system efficiency, reducing the burden on acute care, and ensuring men have easy access to trusted resources.

About MDSC

MDSC is a powerful national voice for Canadians impacted by mental illnesses, uniquely bridging research, digital innovation, and lived experience through system-level partnerships with governments and national organizations. We have a demonstrated track record of delivering low-cost, high-impact interventions—such as our AI navigation tool MIRA, the Elephant in the Room (EITR) anti-stigma campaign, and targeted Veteran peer support programs.

MDSC is a trusted leader and collaborator, ready to provide vital insight, connect community voices, and deliver innovative services that directly support federal priorities in accessibility, prevention, economic growth, and equity. By partnering with MDSC, the federal government can empower community-led solutions that alleviate health system burdens and build a healthier, more productive Canada.

References

- ¹ [Mental Illness and Addiction: Facts and Statistics](#)
- ² [Statistics Canada Mental and substance use disorders in Canada \(2025\)](#)
- ³ [Statistics Canada \(2024\), Suicide in Canada.](#)
- ⁴ [CIHI \(2024\), Children and Youth Mental Health](#)
- ⁵ [Lifetime Prevalence and Comorbidity of Mental Disorders](#)
- ⁶ [Canadian Psychological Association \(2024\), Mental Health and the Workplace.](#)
- ⁷ [Mental health claims in Canada surge by 132 percent since start of pandemic](#)
- ⁸ [Women and Gender Equality Canada](#)
- ⁹ [STRIDE Forward Implementation Plan](#)
- ¹⁰ [Homelessness data snapshot: Mental health, substance use, and homelessness in Canada](#)
- ¹¹ [Pomeroy, S. \(2005\). The Cost of Homelessness: Analysis of Alternate Responses in Four Canadian Cities.](#)
- ¹² <https://menshealthfoundation.ca/press/2025-study-stress-depression-canadian-men/>
- ¹³ [Suicide in Canada: Key statistics](#)