

MEDIA RELEASE

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Canadian Mental Health Association launches manifesto for better mental health in BC

It's time to change the way we think about mental health and addictions care in BC

The Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) today unveiled a five point manifesto that lays out a set of concrete and practical actions to improve the lives of people living with mental health and addictions problems in BC.

The manifesto is a call to action for all British Columbians to get behind the idea that mental health and physical health should be valued equally. It outlines a series of recommendations on how we can create better mental health and addictions care in BC.

We would never knowingly wait until Stage 4 to intervene for cancer; we educate, screen, and take action in the early stages. CMHA BC firmly believes that we need to do the same for mental illnesses and addictions. b4stage4 is about preventing mental illness and addiction, and for those who are experiencing symptoms, intervening in the early years before people reach a crisis point.

When it comes to better mental health and addictions care, there is plenty of evidence for what works. The manifesto calls for BC to adopt community-based programs that have proven successful in treating the early symptoms of low mood, anxiety, and stress. They are cost-effective supports to our overburdened system in BC. But more needs to be done to ensure people get the help they need at any stage or age.

“There is a moral and economic imperative to act b4stage4. Our goal here is to engage individuals and organizations across BC in our manifesto for change,” says Bev Gutray, CEO of CMHA BC. “This is a real opportunity for us all to move toward prevention and early intervention in mental health and addictions, and away from the overuse of emergency services and the justice system.”

“We know that the demand for our health care system is outpacing supply. In fact, demand for mental health and addiction services is expected to more than triple by 2036.¹” continues Gutray. “Too many British Columbians diagnosed with mental illness, such as depression, are not able to access the help they need.”

CMHA is calling on the public to take part in this conversation and support the b4stage4 campaign. British Columbians are encouraged to register their support at www.b4stage4.ca. There, they can sign the manifesto.

To launch b4stage4, CMHA BC will also be hosting a b4stage Conference in Victoria on November 28-30 to further explore ways in which the system can be improved. The b4stage4 Conference will bring together speakers that are both experts in their field and have lived experience of mental health issues. The Right Honourable Norman Lamb, Member of Parliament, United Kingdom, will be the keynote speaker. As a British Liberal Democrat politician, the Right Honourable Lamb played a leading role in driving mental health care to the top of the political agenda in the UK. He steered the 2014 Care Act through Parliament and introduced maximum wait time standards for mental health.

For more information on the conference and to sign up for updates go to www.b4stage4.ca.

¹ BC Ministry of Health. (2014). *Setting priorities for the BC health system*. Victoria, BC.

About the Canadian Mental Health Association, BC Division (CMHA BC)

CMHA BC is a part of Canada's most established mental health charity and the nation-wide leader and champion for mental health. CMHA helps people access the resources they need to maintain and improve mental health, build resilience, and support recovery from mental illness. Each year in BC alone, CMHA serves more than 100,000 people all across the province. For mental health and addiction information and resources visit www.cmha.bc.ca.

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