



Mental Health Peer Support Workers To Be Trained in Diabetes Prevention and Self-Management

June 9, 2010 — The Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA), Ontario, the Ontario Peer Development Initiative (OPDI), and the Provincial Consumer/Survivor LHIN Leads Network (PCSLN) today announced a joint two-year project to provide diabetes competency training for mental health peer support workers.

This project will increase the skills of mental health peer support workers in providing support for the prevention and self-management of diabetes in the high-risk population of people living with a serious mental illness and will increase awareness in the diabetes community of the role mental health support workers can play in prevention and self-management support.

Among the many health problems facing people with serious mental illness, the high risk of diabetes is well-documented. Diabetes is not only more prevalent in the population of people living with serious mental illnesses but also under-diagnosed and under-treated. Rates of diabetes are two to four times greater than the general population and studies have found a 25 to 33 percent incidence of previously undiagnosed pre-diabetes and diabetes in community-based cohorts, as well as higher rates of complications developing earlier in the course of the illness. Both depression and schizophrenia are risk factors for the development of type 2 diabetes. (For more information, see "Diabetes and Serious Mental Illness: Future Directions for Ontario — A Report from the March 30, 2009 Think Tank on Diabetes and Serious Mental Illness," April 30, 2009, at www.ontario.cmha.ca/diabetes.)

Supporting people living with diabetes to manage their own illness and improve their health is one of the key features of chronic disease prevention and management. Self-management support goes beyond education to providing people with the skills, tools and confidence they need to take control of their illness and make positive changes in their lives.

This project will apply mental health consumer/survivor expertise in peer support for self-management of mental illness to support for self-management and prevention of diabetes. Mental health peer support is a long-established best practice recognized in Canada. In Ontario, consumer/survivor initiatives (CSIs) have been providing peer support to improve the quality of life for people with lived experience of mental health problems since 1991. Mental health peer support workers — who share the experience of living with a mental health problem, though they may not share the experience of living with diabetes — are ideally situated to support their peers to understand their risk of developing diabetes, to learn and practice prevention strategies, and to self-manage diabetes.

A diabetes peer support training module will be developed and pilot tested by peer support trainers across Ontario. The module will be one of a series of specialty modules that will build on a mental health peer support worker core skills training program currently being developed by OPDI. An evaluation of the training and diabetes module and its application in the field will be

carried out by Cheryl Forchuk, Lawson Health Research Institute. The diabetes training module will then be revised and distributed provincially as a stand-alone resource for training mental health peer support workers delivering peer support in any setting.

The project will also educate the diabetes sector about the existing mental health peer support resources and infrastructure (consumer/survivor initiatives) in Ontario that can be mobilized to address diabetes. A project advisory committee — including representatives from the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, Local Health Integration Networks, Family Health Teams, Community Health Centres, Canadian Diabetes Association, community mental health service providers and other stakeholders — has been created to guide the knowledge exchange strategy.

This project is generously supported by The Lawson Foundation.

About CMHA Ontario

Founded in 1952, Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA), Ontario, is a non-profit, charitable organization committed to improving the lives of people with mental illness and their families, and to the promotion of mental health for all Ontarians. CMHA Ontario achieves its mission through public education, applied research and policy analysis, and advocating for healthy public policy and an effective and efficient health system. Ontario's 32 local CMHA branches provide direct services and supports to communities across the province. More information about CMHA Ontario may be found on our website at <http://www.ontario.cmha.ca/>.

About OPDI

The Ontario Peer Development Initiative (OPDI) is the provincial voice of over 60 consumer/survivor initiatives, peer support organizations, alternative businesses, and patient councils. OPDI values the experiential knowledge of people with lived experience in shaping a valued, recovery-oriented, community-based mental health system that acknowledges the fundamental importance of peer support. OPDI is currently creating a Peer Support Toolkit with funding from the Ontario Trillium Foundation. For more information, please visit <http://www.opdi.org/>.

About PCSLL

The Provincial Consumer/Survivor LHIN Leads Network is provincially mandated to provide leadership for Local Health Integration Network (LHIN) funded Consumer/Survivor Initiatives (CSIs) throughout Ontario and to advise regionally and provincially.

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