

**Attention News Editors:**

## **Provincial strategy cannot defeat poverty without addressing mental health and addictions**

TORONTO, Jan. 31 /CNW/ - The Government of Ontario's poverty reduction initiative must promote the full inclusion of those with mental health and addictions problems in order to be truly far-reaching and comprehensive. That's the message conveyed by a group of leading mental health and addictions service providers and clients in a pre-budget brief released today.

"We are pleased that the government is committed to confronting poverty in Ontario," said Shawn Lauzon, executive director of the Ontario Peer Development Initiative (OPDI). OPDI represents initiatives for mental health and addictions consumers/survivors and peer support organizations that work within Ontario's mental health system. "But any anti-poverty initiative that fails to address the pervasive social exclusion of people with mental health and addictions problems will be incomplete," he added.

Poverty cannot be looked at in isolation from issues such as employment and housing, according to Gail Czukar, Vice-President of Policy, Education and Health Promotion at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH).

"Nearly 50 per cent of the people receiving inpatient care at CAMH get their income from either social assistance or disability insurance, and 47 per cent of our inpatient clients listed a temporary form of housing or were homeless," said Czukar, adding "We cannot separate poverty from a search for solutions to mental illness."

The pre-budget submission comes from a collaborative of service and client organizations committed to strengthening the supports for the clients, families and communities affected by the mental health and addiction problems that affect thousands of Ontarians every year.

The submission calls upon the Government of Ontario to use the 2008 budget to strengthen the supports for people with mental health and addictions problems. The organizations specifically recommend:

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- An increase the income provided by the province's disability support program, and protect it from inflation.
- Further invest in the capacity of addiction programs - to ensure support for those confronting substance abuse and problem gambling which only cost society more.
- A stronger network of consumer-operated services, that are proven to reduce the need for more expensive health care services.
- Increased support for the networks of families who provide critical support for people with mental health problems.

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"Many of those in chronic poverty struggle with mental health problems, substance abuse issues, or both," said Catherine Hardman, past president of Addictions Ontario. "That is why proven, effective addictions treatment and mental health services are a critical element of an anti-poverty strategy."

The Partnership consists of the following organizations: Addictions Ontario, the Canadian Mental Health Association Ontario, the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, the Ontario Association of Patient Councils, the Ontario Federation of Community Mental Health and Addiction Programs, and the Ontario Peer Development Initiative.

For further information: or to arrange interviews, please contact Michael Torres, CAMH Media Relations at [media@camh.net](mailto:media@camh.net) or (416) 535-6015

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