

MEDIA RELEASE

Conference addresses critical issue of depression in adults

(October 15, CALGARY, AB) – Experts from across Alberta and Canada have gathered in Calgary today for a three-day conference to discuss and develop recommendations on improving the mental health of those who experience major depression - a condition for which 200,000 Albertans consult a physician every year. The Consensus Development Conference on Depression in Adults: How to Improve Prevention, Diagnosis, and Treatment – is being held at The Westin Calgary downtown until Friday.

“Providing effective programs and treatment for depression and other mental illnesses is a priority for health policy makers and providers,” Health Minister Ron Liepert said in a message to conference participants. “I commend the Institute of Health Economics, the Alberta Depression Initiative project, Alberta Health Services–Alberta Mental Health Board and the Mental Health Commission of Canada for organizing this conference and working toward a consensus on practical ways to address the critical issue of depression in our society.”

During the conference experts will look at:

- what depression is and how common it is
- how it impacts sufferers, family, and society
- risk factors and improving prevention
- diagnosing depression
- current treatments
- obstacles to managing depression and how to overcome them
- what further research is needed

“I welcome the opportunity to help determine what needs to be done in Canada to turn things around: to improve prevention, diagnosis, and treatment for depression,” said Michael Kirby, the conference’s Jury Chair. “The Mental Health Commission of Canada is delighted to partner with the Institute of Health Economics and bring so many key people together to look at the research and to find solutions.”

Following the first two days of the conference, a panel of experts will develop the consensus statement which will be read publicly by Michael Kirby at the conclusion of the event Friday morning. This statement will provide a number of recommendations to help provide future direction in diagnostic and treatment policies and practices across the country.

Several noted individuals will participate in the conference including:

- The Honourable Michael Kirby, Chair, Mental Health Commission of Canada
- Shelagh Rogers, CBC radio host
- Dr. Scott Patten, UofC researcher
- Dr. Glenda MacQueen, Head, Department of Psychiatry, UofC

Conference partners are the Institute of Health Economics, Alberta Health Services-Alberta Mental Health Board, and the Mental Health Commission of Canada, with support from the Alberta Depression Initiative.

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Backgrounder

What is a consensus development conference?

Consensus development conferences have a unique format much like court hearings which generate a consensus statement that may be of use in health policy and practice. The conference involves 12 – 18 experts who deliver the scientific evidence around 5 – 8 specific questions on a health subject to a jury of the same number of people. The format is an independent look at issues from an unbiased jury who gets in depth presentations of available evidence from recognized experts on the topic during two days of hearings. Periods of testimonial input from the audience (usually 200 – 300 people) including the general public are invited. The panel takes this all into consideration in a "sequestered" period and renders its recommendations in a consensus statement. That statement is read by the jury chair for the experts and the audience, and then widely disseminated across the Canadian health-care system to be considered in health policy and practice.

Key facts on depression

- It is estimated nearly 3 million Canadians will experience depression in their lifetime. (Canadian Mental Health Association)
- Women experience depression twice as often as men.
- Most often depression affects people in their working years, between the ages of 25 and 44.
- Two thirds of people who experience depression do not seek treatment.
- By 2020 the World Health Organization estimates depression will be the #2 cause of “lost years of healthy life worldwide.”
- Depression is one of the leading causes of lost productivity, absenteeism and disability in the workplace.
- A recent study found about 80% of workers believe a person diagnosed with depression would keep the fact secret to avoid damaging their future opportunities at work and nearly half believe someone missing work because of depression would be more likely “to get into trouble or maybe even fired.” (Ipsos Reid, February 2007)