

# DEPRESSION

Have you been touched by it?



IN ONE WAY OR ANOTHER, depression will eventually touch us all. Whether you are a friend, colleague or caregiver of a person diagnosed with depression, you are likely aware of the often debilitating impact this condition can have on people's lives.



- ▶ **Depression can severely limit a person's quality of life.** It can affect how people think about themselves and how they behave with others. Depression can ruin relationships and lead to job loss.
- ▶ It is estimated that two-thirds of people living with depression do not seek treatment. **But there is also good news: depression is highly treatable. With medical help, four out of five people living with depression are able to recover.**
- ▶ **People living with depression are often stigmatized, discriminated against and excluded from social gatherings.** The situation is frequently made worse by the reluctance of people living with depression to seek help. Tragically, some people never learn how to live with this condition, choosing to end their lives, instead.

## DEPRESSION IN ADULTS

### How to Improve Prevention, Diagnosis and Treatment

AT THE RECENT CONSENSUS DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE ON DEPRESSION IN ADULTS, a jury of people working in the mental health field recommended wide-ranging and immediate changes in the way depression is viewed, prevented, diagnosed and treated in Canada.

The jury's key recommendations include:

- ▶ Addressing the stigma of depression through a public-awareness campaign about depression in language that will be understood by everyone
- ▶ Increasing mental health investments in the critical period of childhood and adolescence
- ▶ Developing a comprehensive framework for research in depression through a group of partners led by the Mental Health Commission of Canada
- ▶ Including people with depression (regardless of age) in decision making regarding their own care
- ▶ Encouraging public and private employers to create mentally healthy workplaces and improve support for employees with depression
- ▶ Changing the health-care system so that effective drugs and psychotherapy are accessible to all people with depression
- ▶ Committing to the training and funding of health-care providers

In its concluding statement, the jury observed that, "Governments at all levels need to demonstrate leadership in developing and promoting policies that will create positive changes in the treatment system. They need to champion respect for the person with depression in the home, the workplace and the community. Depression must be recognized as the health priority it is and resourced accordingly. An investment by an informed and caring population is an investment in Canada's future."

"The impressive quality of the scientific papers and discussion that contributed to the final consensus statement on depression makes me hopeful about its ability to initiate change," said jury leader, the Hon. Michael Kirby, Chair of the Mental Health Commission of Canada.

The purpose of a consensus development conference is to evaluate scientific evidence on a health issue and to develop health policy recommendations on the topic. The Consensus Development Conference on Depression in Adults is the third event in the Institute of Health Economics' consensus development conference program.

The complete Consensus Statement on Depression in Adults can be downloaded from the Institute of Health Economics website at [www.ihe.ca](http://www.ihe.ca).

The Consensus Development Conference on Depression in Adults: How to Improve Prevention, Diagnosis and Treatment was hosted by 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.



## MAKING A DIFFERENCE

By learning more about the condition and changing our attitude toward it, we can all make a difference in the lives of people living with depression and of the people around them.

### What Is Depression?

Although everyone occasionally feels sad or blue, these feelings are usually short-lived. Longer periods of distress may occur, such as the grief we experience after the loss of a loved one. However, when feelings of sadness or distress persist and interfere with normal daily life, depression may be present.

### How Common Is Depression?

Depression is extremely common. In fact, it is the leading cause of disability worldwide. It may express itself differently among men and women, among people of various cultural backgrounds and across age groups.

### What Are the Symptoms of Depression?

Most people with depression will experience at least some of the following feelings:

- ▶ long-lasting sadness
- ▶ anxiety
- ▶ emptiness
- ▶ pessimism
- ▶ guilt
- ▶ hopelessness
- ▶ helplessness
- ▶ worthlessness
- ▶ irritability

They may also experience:

- ▶ an inability to feel pleasure
- ▶ loss of interest in sex
- ▶ lack of energy and enthusiasm
- ▶ disturbed sleep
- ▶ changes in appetite
- ▶ thoughts of suicide



If you are concerned about your own mental health or about that of someone you know, contact a health-care provider or a crisis line for help.

### How Is Depression Treated?

Many people living with depression will improve with treatment. Once diagnosed, they can work with their doctors to choose one treatment or a combination of treatments. These include taking antidepressant drugs, talking to a therapist or adopting self-care strategies, such as exercising, eating well and using self-help books and Internet resources. A variety of other treatments can be explored in consultation with a health-care provider.

## STIGMA

MANY PEOPLE LIVING WITH A MENTAL ILLNESS report that the stigmatization of mental illness is worse than the condition itself.

**Stigma** refers to the negative and prejudicial ways in which people living with mental illness are labelled by others. Often, that means being viewed as nothing more than the disease itself. Stigma is an internal attitude and belief held by some individuals, often about a minority group, such as people with mental illness.

**Discrimination** refers to the way people living with mental illness are treated, intentionally or unintentionally, as a result of this stigmatization. People with mental illness are often exposed to such negative behaviours as exclusion, bullying, ridicule, disrespect and devaluation. Such discrimination can result in limits and barriers to many of life's opportunities.



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## WORKPLACE FACTS

**18%** of employees in Canada report having been diagnosed with clinical depression. Another 8% believe they have depression but have not been clinically diagnosed with the condition.

**30%** of workers in Canada claim to know someone in the workplace who has been diagnosed with depression.

*Ipsos Reid, November 2007*

**Only 18%** of managers surveyed report having received training to help them identify and deal with employees who exhibit signs of depression.

Depression most often affects people in their working years, between the ages of **24 and 44**.

**It is in the workplace** that people with depression will try hardest to mask their illness.

*Canadian Mental Health Association*

## DEPRESSION IN THE WORKPLACE

MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS ARE OFTEN FIRST NOTICED BY COLLEAGUES IN THE WORKPLACE. Sometimes co-workers are uncomfortable being around an employee living with depression. According to recent statistics, roughly 80% of workers believe that people diagnosed with depression would keep it secret to avoid damaging their reputation at work; nearly half believe that someone who misses work because of depression would be more likely “to get in trouble or maybe even fired” (*Ipsos Reid, February 2007*).

Many employers fear that employees living with depression may never function at their pre-diagnosis level. Because of social stigmatization and the absence of support in the workplace, people living with depression may choose not to seek help.



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The Institute of Health Economics is a non-profit organization committed to producing, gathering and disseminating health research findings from health economics, health policy and health technology assessment and comparative effectiveness to improve the delivery of health care and to support a sustainable future.

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The Mental Health Commission of Canada is a non-profit organization created to focus national attention on mental health issues. It is funded by the federal government but operates at arm's length from all levels of government.

The Commission's objective is to enhance the health and social outcomes of Canadians living with mental health problems and illnesses.

[mentalhealthcommission.ca](http://mentalhealthcommission.ca)