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Written Submission Summary to

The Mental Health Commission of Canada

on

Toward Recovery and Well-Being: A Framework for a Mental Health Strategy for Canada

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**A PAHO/WHO
Collaborating Centre**

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This submission has been prepared by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) in response to the draft *Toward Recovery and Well-Being: A Framework for a Mental Health Strategy for Canada* (January 2009).

CAMH is hopeful that the MHCC will be successful in mobilizing government and public support for strengthening our collective response to mental health problems. A national mental health strategy must clearly make the case that political will and public resources can transform mental health care in Canada. We are grateful to the MHCC for developing this draft national framework, and for consulting widely on the draft.

CAMH offers responses to two primary questions: first, do the goals articulated by the framework resonate with our experience and our aspirations for mental health treatment and support?; second, what are we expecting to be more clearly established as specific goals for the next stage of the national strategy?

Do the goals articulated by *Toward Recovery and Well-Being* resonate?

The goals articulated by the document comprise many of the key attributes of a national response to mental health concerns. We offer the following commentary on the draft goals:

- The attributes of a recovery orientation as described by the framework are fully consistent with CAMH's approach to client care. We believe that the best client care is rooted in an understanding of individual client need as identified by the client; we believe that a choice of services is critically important, and that empowering people with mental health problems is a fundamental attribute of effective mental health care.
- Mental health promotion and illness prevention must be a critical element of a mental health plan.
- No mental health plan in today's Canada can be complete without recognition of the need for services to respond more effectively to diversity. We applaud the need to address socioeconomic disparities in a transformed mental health system.
- We strongly support increased recognition of the role that families and other non-professional caregivers play in the lives of people with mental health problems.
- Asserting the need to strengthen access to services is fundamental to transforming mental health care in Canada. That is why this goal must play a central role in the framework for a mental health strategy. *How* a system of care operates becomes markedly less important when large numbers of people simply do not have access to the care they need.
- CAMH is committed to discovering, sharing and applying new knowledge; we also recognize the need to demonstrate accountability to our stakeholders. We

strongly endorse the need to include a call for evidence and outcomes monitoring in a national framework for a mental health strategy.

- The Commission has done an admirable job of describing the range of discrimination and stigma attached to mental health problems – from overt discrimination against individuals to structural inequities, such as inadequate funding.
- CAMH knows that broad public acknowledgment of the need to improve care for people with mental health problems is on the rise. We welcome a national social movement that works with existing stakeholders to build broader public support for recognizing the consequences of mental health problems and the hope of effective treatment.

What are we looking for in the next stage of developing a national strategy?

We offer the following reflections on issues we feel must be addressed in the next stage of the development of a national mental health plan:

Mental health care within primary care

There is a significant gap between those who need mental health care in Canada and those who currently have access to services. Primary care will be required to play an enormous role in closing this gap. The national strategy can articulate the range of mental health services that ought to be available within primary care, and articulate primary care's critical role in addressing the physical health care needs of people with mental illness.

Housing

A national mental health strategy must assert the importance of affordable housing to people living with mental health problems. In our experience, housing is often the critical service gap. The national strategy should establish pan-Canadian goals to increase access to affordable housing, including models of high support housing.

Integration of mental health and addiction services

The evidence is clear that integrated support for people with co-occurring mental and substance use disorders are more effective than non-integrated treatment and support. The prevalence, intensity and cost of concurrent disorders require purposeful efforts to integrate clinical services, and ought to be part of a mental health strategy.

Intersection of mental health and criminal justice

For some Canadians, the point of entry to mental health services is the criminal justice system. Forensic mental health services are often viewed quite distinctly from the rest of mental health care. But we strongly believe that forensic mental health services can be delivered in a manner that extends the principles of client-centred care, client empowerment and system integration with community service providers. The national strategy for mental health should describe how forensic mental services can contribute

to a system of mental health care that provides effective, evidence-based treatment in collaboration with community-based clinicians and support services.

Conclusion

The Commission has generated significant goodwill among mental health stakeholders and with governments. CAMH is committed to working closely with the Commission in its efforts to develop a national mental health strategy that has an impact across the country. We believe that the framework needs to be followed promptly by a set of specific goals for transformed care that can be implemented by jurisdictions (federal, provincial/territorial). The most difficult decisions about resource allocation and policy direction will be made by specific jurisdictions – particularly provincial/territorial governments. The national plan must be a catalyst for system change and improved care within each of the many Canadian jurisdictions whose mandates touch the lives of people with mental health problems.