

Mental Illness: The Cost of Doing Nothing

On Saturday, May 5, 2012, the Honourable Michael Wilson, former Canadian Ambassador to the U.S. and former Minister of Finance, spoke at the annual Fundraising Breakfast of Shalom Counselling Services. Wilson has been a strong advocate for better mental health services for many years. He was the co-author of a major study on mental illness in the workplace. His address at the Shalom Breakfast was titled, "Mental Illness: The Cost of Doing Nothing." He made the following points:

- One in five Canadians is impacted by mental illness at some point in their life. We are all affected either personally, through a family member, friend or co-worker.
- Mental illness is the number one cause of disability claims, workplace illness and absenteeism. Each day in Canada, 500,000 people (the population of Waterloo Region) are absent from work due to mental illness. Many more suffer from "presenteeism" (i.e. they are at work but not functioning due to mental illness).
- Over 800,000 children and youth are affected by mental illness each year. Suicide is the second leading cause of death among youth.
- 70% of those affected by mental illness display symptoms by age 18.
- Early intervention has been demonstrated to make a big difference in coping with or overcoming mental illness. Building an integrated system of supports is Job 1.
- We need to expand the range of mental health services available at the front line. Too few child psychologists are being trained.
- We need to invest more in brain science and research. The brain is an "unknown universe."
- Over half of those suffering from mental illness are too ashamed to talk about it and suffer in silence. Only one in three receive adequate treatment. Stigma and discrimination are deadly barriers to treatment and recovery.
- A study led by Senator Michael Kirby called "Out of the Shadows at Last" was the first comprehensive study of mental illness and addiction in Canada. It resulted in the creation of the Mental Health Commission. On May 7, 2012 Canada's first National Mental Health Strategy was announced.
- A change in attitude is needed. Mental illness is treatable. When people like Olympic athlete Clara Hughes speak openly about suffering from depression, this greatly helps to reduce the stigma of mental illness.
- There is reason for hope. We need to replace fear with a new hope for the future. Early diagnosis leads to early treatment. Early treatment leads to early recovery.

Shalom Counselling Services thanks Michael Wilson for his work on this important topic and also thanks him for sharing his time and insight on this topic with us.

- notes from Brian Hunsberger, Development Director, Shalom Counselling Services