

Mental Health Community Expresses Concern with Proposed NCRMD Changes

Changes must consider the unique needs of people with mental illness

WINNIPEG, Feb. 8, 2013 /CNW/ - Today, the Government of Canada tabled a Bill proposing changes to the Not Criminally Responsible on account of Mental Disorder (NCRMD) provisions of the Criminal Code. The Bill proposes, amongst other things, that annual reviews for individuals deemed NCRMD of a violent crime can be pushed to every three years and that "high risk" NCRMD accused cannot be considered for release by a Review Board until their designation is revoked by a court.

Given the significance of passing such changes, Canada's mental health community has come together to form a working alliance in an effort to strengthen their voice on this critical matter - which is of vital importance to the mental health community and the one in five Canadians with mental illness.

The alliance strongly believes it has the knowledge, resources and tools that will allow the Government to move ahead with NCRMD changes that will take into account the need to protect the public from dangerous persons, while addressing the therapeutic needs of these mentally disordered offenders so as to mitigate risk and promote recovery.

"The Government of Canada has made progress in enhancing public understanding of mental health and mental illness with important initiatives such as the development of the Mental Health Commission. However, these proposed changes are inconsistent with its work to-date," said Chris Summerville, Alliance Facilitator and Chief Executive Officer, Schizophrenia Society of Canada. "These changes will unnecessarily heighten the public's fears, increase negative stigma around mental illness and ultimately undermine the reintegration of NCRMD individuals without increasing public safety."

In Canada's most populated province, Ontario, only .001% of individuals charged with Criminal Code violations were adjudicated NCRMD. Recidivism rates for NCRMD individuals range from 2.5 to 7.5%. These numbers are far lower than that of federal offenders in the regular justice system, at a rate of 41 to 44%. And despite what Canadians are lead to believe, the seriousness of the crime committed does not equate to the likelihood for the offender to reoffend or even his/her ability to improve his/her mental health state and live a normal, healthy life.

The alliance recognizes that the government's review of the mental disorder provisions of the Criminal Code is important to many Canadians, and it also recognizes the fact that the public has legitimate reasons to be concerned about safety, however the group is working together to ensure that this public policy is informed by the latest evidence based knowledge.

The working alliance has requested a meeting with the Minister of Justice to discuss these proposed changes. Implementing such legislation cannot be in the best interest of Canadians without consulting and working with the mental health community. Canadians want a working mental health system and not an out-dated approach.

SOURCE: Schizophrenia Society of Canada

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