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DISCRIMINATION AND STIGMA PLAGUE CANADIANS WITH SCHIZOPHRENIA

A new national report calls for greater public awareness about schizophrenia

WINNIPEG, MB - March 30, 2009 – According to a national report released today by the Schizophrenia Societies across Canada, 60% of Canadians assume that people living with schizophrenia are likely to act violently toward others. *Schizophrenia in Canada: A National Report* calls on Canadians, health care professionals and government to support a National Mental Health Strategy that addresses the disparities and inequities faced daily by those living with schizophrenia and their family members.

The report describes different factors affecting those with schizophrenia, such as public perceptions and discrimination, quality of life, access to health care services, access to medications, wait times and government spending on mental health. These are key factors that illustrate the standard of schizophrenia care in Canada.

“While 92% of Canadians surveyed have heard of schizophrenia, most do not understand what it is or its symptoms. In fact, the majority confuse it with split personality disorder,” said Chris Summerville, CEO, Schizophrenia Society of Canada. “Misconceptions such as these lead to negative stereotyping and stigma towards people living with schizophrenia.”

The report examines how stigma negatively impacts the lives of people living with schizophrenia. Stigma causes gradual social isolation, making it harder for them to seek the help and treatment they need to manage their illness.

The report found that people with schizophrenia also experienced discrimination within the Canadian health care system. *Schizophrenia in Canada* calls highlights the findings of a 2008

report by the Fraser Institute on hospital waiting times, in which, physicians were asked to provide a reasonable wait time to receive various medical treatments. On average patients are waiting over six weeks longer for psychiatric treatment than is deemed reasonable¹.

“It is simply unacceptable that people living with schizophrenia wait an average of 18.6 weeks from referral to receiving treatment for psychiatric care,” said Mr. Summerville. “Mental health must be considered a top priority in the national and provincial wait time strategies.”

The research for *Schizophrenia in Canada: A National Report* was conducted by Léger Marketing and supported through an unrestricted educational grant from Pfizer Canada Inc.

About the Schizophrenia Society of Canada

The Schizophrenia Society of Canada began in 1979 and is dedicated to improving the quality of life for those affected by schizophrenia and psychosis through education, support programs, public policy and research. The Society works with 10 provincial societies in a federation model to: raise awareness and educate the public in order to reduce stigma and discrimination; support families and individuals; advocate for legislative change; and support research through the SSC Foundation and other independent efforts. All the Societies are united through each organization’s efforts and share a common goal to raise awareness and educate the public in order to reduce stigma and discrimination.

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¹ Source: Fraser Institute, *Waiting Your Turn: Hospital Waiting Lists in Canada, 2008 Report*.