



September 16, 2002

The Right Honourable Jean Chretien, P.C., M.P.
Prime Minister of Canada
180 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON
K1A 0A2

Dear Mr. Prime Minister:

You have recently announced that Her Excellency, the Governor General of Canada will deliver the Speech From the Throne on September 30th, 2002 that will set the social policy agenda for your government for the next session of Parliament. The Canadian Medical Association, the Canadian Psychiatric Association, the Canadian Psychological Association and the Canadian Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health have come together to urge you to consider including initiatives dealing specifically with mental illnesses and mental health.

A recent Health Canada report, "The Economic Burden of Mental Health Problems in Canada" (2001), states that "*the estimated total burden of \$14.4 billion places mental health problems among the costliest conditions in Canada.*" According to Canadian epidemiologists, mental disorders affect one in five Canadians in any one year and 3% of Canadians are affected by severe mental illnesses that produce profound and persistent disablement. Nearly 4000 Canadians take their own lives each year. The World Health Report - 2001 points out that "*the economic impact of mental disorders is wide ranging, long lasting and huge. These disorders impose a range of costs on individuals, families and communities as a whole*" The report adds that some studies "*have estimated the aggregate economic costs of mental disorders. One such study ...concluded that the aggregate yearly cost for the United States accounted for about 2.5% of the gross national product*". Our own Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology reported, "*the common thread woven through the witnesses presentations was the need to invest more in prevention and promotion.*"

On October 2nd a Summit on Mental Illness and Mental Health will be convened in Ottawa. Mental illness and mental health professional and national voluntary health organizations representing Canadian consumers, families, service providers and professional organizations will be in attendance. We expect that, at the conclusion of the Summit, a united voice will call for a **National Action Plan on Mental Illness and Mental Health**. As this Summit will occur just shortly after The Speech From the Throne we felt it incumbent on us to send you this letter now and urge that the Speech recognize that mental illness and mental health issues are among the most pressing of all health care issues in Canada.

With the greatest of respect, Mr. Prime Minister, we urge you to give thoughtful consideration to the contents of this letter and to send a signal that your government intends to address these very important concerns.

Yours sincerely,

Dana W. Hanson, MD, FRCPC
President, Canadian Medical Association

Abraham S. Ross, PhD
President, Canadian Psychological Association

Phil Upshall
Chair
Canadian Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health
(Includes Presidents of: Canadian Mental Health Association,
Mood Disorders Society of Canada, National Network for
Mental Health, and the Schizophrenia Society of Canada)

Jean-Marie Albert, MD, FRCPC
President, Canadian Psychiatric Association

CC: Hon Anne McLellan