

Centers for Disease Control
and Prevention (CDC)
Atlanta GA 30333

Nov. 19 2003

John Service, Ph.D.
Executive Director
Canadian Psychological Association
151 Slater Street, Suite 205
Ottawa, ON
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Dear Dr. Service,

I am writing to recommend that you discuss with Health Canada officials the inclusion of behavioral and social scientists in the new federal public health agency being created in Canada. This is a prime opportunity to recognize that, in addition to epidemiology, laboratory sciences, and other biomedical sciences, the behavioral and social sciences play an important role in public health. Because public health activities focus on prevention, behavioral and social scientists are critical in developing, implementing, and evaluating prevention programs. Behavioral and social scientists also play important roles in research and evaluation of policy.

At the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), over 500 of the approximately 9,500 employees are behavioral and social scientist. Behavioral and social scientists are located in all of the Centers, Institute, and Offices that comprise CDC and an increasing number are posted in CDC's overseas activities. Two Centers — the National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion and the National Center for HIV, STD, and TB Prevention — have the largest numbers of behavioral and social scientists.

The importance of behavioral and social scientists has been recognized at CDC for many years. The February 1997 issue of *American Psychologist* included a series of articles on behavioral and social sciences at CDC, which reviewed the importance of, and roles for, behavioral and social scientists at CDC, as well as a description of some exemplary programs. The information from this issue is still largely current. Similar articles from specific areas (e.g., HIV, injury) also have been published. These articles are enclosed.

Behavioral and social scientists bring a unique perspective to public health. Training programs in these areas include the study of theory, qualitative and quantitative research methods (including areas such as questionnaire design, conducting focus groups and participant observations, and data analysis), and the design and evaluation of prevention programs. Some areas of the behavioral and social sciences such as clinical psychology and health education also involve training in the delivery of health care services.

Behavioral and social scientists contribute to public health investigations by explaining health-related behaviors and factors that influence them. In addition, there are key behaviors that affect acceptance of public health recommendations, such as seeking treatment or vaccines, or adherence to healthy behaviors and other clinical recommendations. Behavioral and social scientists make significant contributions to public health by helping to:

- Identify key information about disease transmission
- Identify or develop prevention programs
- Strengthen findings of the investigation
- Improve the public health response

In 1995, CDC established the Behavioral and Social Sciences Working Group (BSSWG) to further the integration of behavioral and social sciences into research and prevention activities. BSSWG has over 200 members and members serve on a variety of scientific, program, and policy committees throughout the agency to ensure representation of the behavioral and social sciences. Several times per year, the group sponsors CDC-wide guest lectures on relevant topics, such as measurement, sampling, qualitative research, and community-based research. BSSWG serves as an important group through which behavioral and social scientists in the agency can network to share ideas. This networking provides an overall benefit to the agency because knowledge about theory, practice, and research is shared across Centers and is adapted to a variety of prevention programs and other public health activities.

As the federal public infrastructure is being re-evaluated and restructured in Canada, there is a unique opportunity to recognize and integrate the important contributions of behavioral and social sciences to public health. The prevention and control of disease is heavily dependent on the capacity of the public health system to change health behaviors, engage the public in treatment or prevention, and evaluate policies and programs. The need for understanding and influencing behavioral and social change underlies most of these health activities. Your efforts to include behavioral scientists into the federal public health infrastructure will help address these issues and contribute to your leadership in public health. The Executive Committee of BSSWG at the U.S. CDC has expressed their willingness to share their experiences to assist you in these endeavors. If you wish to contact the committee directly, you may do so by calling Dr. Mary Spink Neumann, BSSWG Executive Chair at (404) 639-1928, or Dr. Amy Lansky, BSSWG Executive Vice Chair at (770) 488-6284.

Sincerely,

Dixie E. Snider, Jr., M.D., M.P.H.
Assistant Surgeon General and
Acting Deputy Director
for Public Health Science

Enclosure