



Mental Health Commission of Canada Launches National Research Project to Find Sustainable Solutions for People With Mental Health Issues Who Are Homeless

Montreal demonstration site will investigate 'Housing First' approach

MONTREAL, November 23, 2009 – Montreal is one of five cities selected by the Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) for implementation of its ground-breaking national research project to find the best way to provide housing and services to people who are living with mental illness and homelessness. Using a 'Housing First' approach, the research project focuses on first providing people who are homeless with a place to live, and then other assistance and services they may require. The idea is to see if this approach is better than traditional 'care as usual.'

Up to 500 homeless people with a mental illness living in Montreal will be among the 2,285 participants in the national study. Of these, as many as 300 local participants in the research project will be given a place to live and offered a range of support services – such as help with grocery shopping or getting to a doctor's appointment - to help them over the course of the study. The rest of the participants will receive the services that are currently available in the five test sites. Both groups will be compared to see which method works best.

"When you have a roof over your head, you feel safe and comfortable. When you have a bed to sleep in every night, you are better able to stand up to mental illness. When you can keep a home, you are better able to keep a job," said Sonia Côté, Montreal At Home Project Site Coordinator.

The At Home/ Chez Soi project is the largest of its kind in Canada. The research project will help make Canada a world leader in providing better services to people living with homelessness and mental illness. Each test site focuses on a specific target population within the overall study group.

In Montreal, the project will focus on the different mental health services provided to homeless people, will allow us to learn more about outcomes related to social housing, and will include helping homeless people living with mental illness eventually return to the workplace. Moncton will examine the shortages of services for Anglophones and Francophones; Toronto will provide specialized services for people from diverse ethno-cultural backgrounds. In Winnipeg the needs of urban Aboriginal people will be highlighted and in Vancouver the project is aimed at people with addictions and substance abuse problems.

The MHCC is working closely with many partners on this project, including provincial and municipal levels of government, researchers, many local service providers and individuals who have experienced homelessness and mental illness. "This research initiative is meant to represent a significant step forward in understanding and reducing the incidence of homelessness in Canada," said the Honourable Michael Kirby, Chair of the MHCC.

Participants in Montreal will get housing units within a number of different locations across the city, including private apartments and social housing. They will be able to stay in the housing for the duration of the project. Participants in the Housing First approach will have to pay a portion of their rent, will meet with program staff once a week, and will be encouraged to make use of the support services. Participants in the non-Housing First group will meet with an interviewer every three months.

Key research and service delivery partners in the Montreal demonstration project include: Institut universitaire en santé mentale Douglas; Le Centre de recherche de Montréal sur les inégalités sociales (CREMIS); Le Collectif de recherche sur l'itinérance (CRI); Le centre de recherche Fernand-Séguin; Hôpital Louis-H. Lafontaine; Centre affilié universitaire (CAU) - Centre de santé et services sociaux (CSSS) Jeanne-Mance; Centre hospitalier de l'Université de Montréal (CHUM); Programme intervention et recherches psycauses—Diogène; Centre Dollard-Cormier IUD; Le Réseau alternatif et communautaire des organismes en santé mentale (RACOR); Hôpital Louis-H. Lafontaine Centre universitaire de santé McGill (CUSM); St. Mary's Hospital Center; and the Government of Canada.

“The study will produce evidence on whether providing a place, plus services, will better support reintegration into functional, meaningful living,” said Jayne Barker, Director, At Home/Chez Soi Project. “Another research question is cost. Will it cost less to house and provide services than it would if these marginalized individuals were in hospitals, prisons and shelters?” said Paula Goering, Research Lead, At Home/Chez Soi Project.

Montreal has one of Canada's largest homeless populations, estimated between 28,000 and 30,000 people, with as many as 13,000 living on the street for a year or more. Each year, the city's homeless population grows younger and includes more women and Aboriginal people.

A study by the Canadian Policy Research Networks found the *Housing First* approach shows promising results compared to traditional 'treatment first' approaches. *Housing First* participants remain housed longer, spend fewer days in hospital and are no more likely to use drugs and alcohol. According to Corrections Canada, the cost of incarceration in a federal prison averages \$90,000 per year, per inmate.

The Mental Health Commission of Canada is a non-profit organization created to focus national attention on mental health issues and to work to improve the health and social outcomes of people living with mental illness. In February 2008, the federal government allocated \$110 million to the MHCC to find ways to help the growing number of people who are homeless and have a mental illness. Updates on the study will be posted on the MHCC website at www.mentalhealthcommission.ca.

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For further information or to arrange an interview, please contact:

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