

# **Canadian Mental Health Association – National National Consumer Advisory Council Position Paper in Support of the Mental Health Commission of Canada’s Research Project ‘Making the Case for Peer Support’**

## **Recommendation:**

- 1 That members of the CMHA-National NCAC (National Consumer Advisory Council) support the ‘Making the Case for Peer Support’ Research Project being carried out by the Mental Health Commission of Canada’s Service System Advisory Committee.

## **About The Research Project**

The Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) is funding this project to document the current state of peer support activities in the mental health system in Canada, and to propose legislative, policy, funding and evaluative strategies that will strengthen peer support capacity, including peer-directed initiatives in Canada. A group of international consultants with lived experience and knowledge in peer support have been contracted by the MHCC Mental Health Peer Support Project Committee, and will be gathering the essential information for the project. A report will be written which describes peer support activities across Canada and makes recommendations for how peer support can be integrated into provincial and territorial mental health systems. The findings will also inform, the MHCC Mental Health Strategy for Canada and other MHCC initiatives. A database of peer support initiatives across Canada will also be developed which may become part of the MHCC Knowledge Exchange Centre.

This research will explore both internal and external factors that influence peer support across Canada. Some of the internal factors to be examined include values, benefits, challenges, governance, management, delivery and membership. Some of the external factors that will be explored include legislation, policy, funding, and mental health cultures and attitudes.

**Issue** There is a need to recognize and understand that mutual aid and peer support is the fundamental resource/philosophy of organizations run with and by individuals who are living with, through and beyond a mental illness and that this approach is a necessary and complimentary alternative to the formal mental health system.

**What is Peer Support?** Peer support is the foundation upon which consumer run organizations or independent and unfunded groups base their work and effort. It is the pillar of self-help and the recovery process. It is the process by which like-minded individuals with similar experiences – who have travelled or are travelling the road – encourage and support each other to continue the healing. Those who have experienced the illness, the system, the clinical process, the drugs and the obstacles are in the best position to share knowledge gained by lived experience.

**Rationale** Peer Support allows an outlet for an individual living with a mental illness to openly and honestly express the pain, suffering and frustration that the illness has caused. It creates an atmosphere of trust between peers and knowledge that peer support will be non-judgmental. Peer Support permits exploration of one's inner self to discover previously unknown strengths that will aid the individual on their journey to recovery. Most importantly, Peer Support recognizes the immense power of experiential knowledge. This is a knowledge that can never be learned in a classroom or from a book. It is a knowledge that allows one to say, "I have been where you are now and I'm here for you!"

### **Sources/Bibliography**

1. Mental Health Commission of Canada – Service System Advisory Committee Research Project 'Making the Case for Peer Support' – written by Susan Hardie – MHCC Research Associate. The two consumer co-leads of this project, Laurie Hall and Loise Forest, presented this project and received the full support of the MHCC, [www.mentalhealthcommissioncanada.ca](http://www.mentalhealthcommissioncanada.ca)
2. Canadian Coalition of Alternative Mental Health Resources – Peer Support Position Policy Paper – written by Roy Muise – ratified by CCAMR March 31, 2007, [www.ccamhr.ca](http://www.ccamhr.ca).