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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

CACP STATEMENT ABOUT THE CANADIAN MENTAL HEALTH COMMISSION

The recent proposal by the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology that the federal government should establish a mental health commission is welcome news to the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police (CACP). The Canadian Mental Health Commission, an initiative announced by Federal Health Minister Dosanjh on November 28, 2005, will provide leadership in the broad area of mental health including making mental health planning a government priority, reducing the fragmentation of mental health programs and policies, facilitating the development and exchange of research and best practices, and reducing stigma.

According to Chief of Police Terry Coleman of the Moose Jaw (SK) Police, a member of the board of directors of CACP and co-chair of the CACP police/mental health systems initiative, "It is no secret that there is an increasing amount of contact between the police and persons with mental illnesses. Much of this is attributable to the increasing difficulty of accessing mental health services in recent years. While police services remain committed to providing humane and appropriate services to people with mental illnesses, just as we do to other citizens, there is no doubt that we are often not the most appropriate resource for these individuals. But in the absence of a coherent and integrated mental health system, the tasks often falls to us."

CACP has shown leadership in this area over the past five years through the development of a national police/mental health liaison committee – the Canadian National Committee for Police/Mental Health Liaison – which fosters cooperative ventures between police services and mental health agencies. This committee is a member of the Canadian Alliance for Mental Illness and Mental Health (CAMIMH), an alliance of national organizations who have been actively encouraging the development of a national action plan with respect to mental health and mental illness issues.

Dr. Dorothy Cotton, a psychologist and also co-chair of the liaison committee, adds, "persons experiencing mental illnesses are now more likely to find themselves dealing with the police and the criminal justice system by default, as these individuals and their families, friends and communities find themselves frustrated in their attempts to access mental health services. Police services have gone a long way in developing education and training for their members, as well as trying to coordinate linkages with the mental health system. The proposed Canadian Mental Health Commission is a significant step toward addressing the problem of stigma and the criminalization of mental illness in Canada."

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