



# NUPGE submission to Mental Health Commission of Canada

May 28, 2008

'Profound change is essential if people living with mental illness are to receive the help they need and deserve.' - James Clancy

Ottawa (26 May 2008) - The National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE) has presented a [14-page brief](#) to the Mental Health Commission of Canada recommending broad change in four key areas ... the national public health care system, health human resources, community-based social services and the criminal justice system.

The commission was created last year by the federal government, in co-operation with the provinces and territories, to provide an ongoing national focus for mental health issues. Many of NUPGE's members across Canada work in the health care system, including mental health services, as frontline care providers.

"More and more Canadians are growing concerned about our inability or unwillingness to provide accessible and high quality mental health services to all who may need them," NUPGE president James Clancy says in a letter to commission chair Michael Kirby.

"We all look for those moments in life when we can make a difference. This is one of those rare moments. The creation of the Mental Health Commission of Canada may be the clearest and most direct chance we ever have to make positive change. We look forward to working with the commission to grasp the opportunity at hand and prove that a different world is possible," the submission says.

"These workers have given extraordinary service in bringing better health to Canadians. They are intimately involved in the health care system, working with patients on a daily basis. Based on the unique experiences of these workers we believe we can provide valuable insight and common sense recommendations to the work of the commission."

Following are the union's comments and recommendations in the four areas cited:

Public health care:

"We urge the commission to recommend that all governments increase their investment in both institutional and community-based services, and recommend that the federal government take the long overdue step of ensuring that mental health services are included as medically necessary services under the Canada Health Act.

"This is an essential step in the evolution of Canada's public health care system. As with all sectors of the health care system, mental health services face large and growing shortages of health professionals."

Health human resources:

"Shortages of doctors and nurses have received a lot of attention, but that's just the tip of the iceberg. There are also growing shortages of highly skilled health professionals and frontline community workers that are vital to mental health services such as: social workers, psychologists, counselors, pharmacists, child mental health therapists, mental health nurses and clinicians and mental health rehabilitation counselors.

"We urge the commission to recommend that the federal government work with the provinces to develop and implement a national health human resources strategy to ensure that Canada has an adequate, well-educated and effective mental health workforce for the future."

Community-based social services:

"It is critical that people with mental health issues have access to a comprehensive spectrum of services from promotion through diagnosis, treatment and support. In particular, community-based social services such as employment assistance, safe and adequate housing, counseling, peer support services, income maintenance services, crisis intervention, women's services and emergency shelters are vital.

"These community-based social services provide direct support and treatment to individuals and families and foster the social and economic inclusion of people with mental illnesses. They can also help identify the symptoms of mental illness and address the social determinants of health as they relate to people with mental health issues. Yet our members who work in this sector report that as a result of chronic under-funding by governments our system of community-based social services is fragmented, with services that are difficult to access and uneven in quality, and in many cases the services simply do not exist.

"We urge the commission to call on all levels of government to adequately fund the broad range of community-based social services that are essential to ensuring that people with mental health problems live rich and fulfilling lives in their communities."

Criminal justice:

"A lack of institutional and community-based support and services has meant that many people dealing with mental illnesses fall through the cracks and end up in the criminal justice system.

"Our members who work in provincial correctional facilities report that the population of new inmates with significant, identified mental health needs is surging at a serious rate. Our governments must act swiftly to ensure these Canadians get the treatment and support they need rather than being placed in correctional facilities."

In submitting the brief to the commission, the union hopes to contribute to the development of a new national strategy to deal with mental illness at all levels in Canada.

"We recognize there are many other important areas related to mental health reform that must also be addressed, including action to tackle stigma and discrimination," the brief says.

"Clearly, profound change is essential if people living with mental illness are to receive the help they need and deserve. The task has never been more formidable. The need has never been greater. We remain optimistic that with the creation of the Mental Health Commission of Canada the time has come when meaningful change can and will be made. We look forward to working with the commission to help make meaningful change a reality." NUPGE

More information:

â—□ [NUPGE submission: No Health Without Mental Health - pdf](#)

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180 East Columbia  
New Westminster, BC V3L 0G7

Website  
[www.hsabc.org](http://www.hsabc.org)

Telephone 604-517-0994  
1-800-663-2017