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Deputy Minister of Health and Wellness

12th Annual Canadian Collaborative Mental Health Conference

Friday, June 24, 2011

World Trade and Convention Center

It is a pleasure to be here this morning.

Minister MacDonald would have like to be here, and has asked that I send wishes for a successful conference on her behalf.

On behalf of the Province of Nova Scotia, and the Department of Health and Wellness, I would like to welcome delegates from across the province, country and world to the 12th Canadian Collaborative Mental Healthcare Conference.

It is a privilege to host you, and I hope you enjoy your time here in Nova Scotia.

We are very pleased to have the opportunity to host these discussions, and I want o thank all of the people who had a hand in coordinating this impressive professional development and networking opportunity.

I would like to specifically thank Dr. A.J. and Cheryl Billard for their leadership in bringing the local, national and international speakers to this forum.

This year's conference theme "Charting a New Course to Better Care: Stronger Links between Consumers, Families and Health Care Providers," links directly with the work government is doing to improve and enhance mental health service and care in Nova Scotia.

We know that one in five Canadians is affected by mental illness in their lifetimes, and most Nova Scotians will be indirectly affected by mental illness through relationships with friends, family members, and co-workers.

We know the cost to the Canadian economy is 51 billion dollars annually, and here in Nova Scotia we may be losing as much as **\$50 million** a year due to undiagnosed and untreated depression.

It's a **big problem** no matter where we live.

Mental illness is so widespread and so prevalent within society that to address it, we need to work together – to share best practices and approaches.

Mental health is a priority for government, and we are committed to working closely with our community partners, government colleagues and many others to ensure appropriate mental health care services are available to people when they need it.

Our provincial role is to make policies and set standards, and to provide core services and provincial programs. And we monitor and audit.

Indeed, we are one of the few provinces that gathers data on mental health wait times. The system is not perfect, but we're working on it

This is one part of our overall plan to deliver better care sooner and offer stability and peace-of-mind.

Collaboration is a key component to the success of any health care initiative, and it is refreshing to see such a diverse crowd of consumers, citizens, families and physicians, service providers here today.

Your progressive work to improve mental health care across our country is admirable, and I am looking forward to the many learnings that will come out of your networking over the next two days.

Nothing is more important to Nova Scotians, and Canadians than health care.

Every one of us has had experience with the health care system and we never underestimate the importance and value it holds in our lives.

I would like to take a few moments to speak about the new direction of health care in Nova Scotia and our focus on improving mental health supports and services across the province.

A main focus of our Better Care Sooner Plan to improve care for those people with mental illness, and those with other complex needs.

One way we are doing this is through the development of a Mental Health and Addictions Strategy. This strategy will work to revamp mental health and addiction services in Nova Scotia.

The Strategy will help ensure timely access to quality services and that's the priority. It is about patient care, getting services to people and having high levels of patient satisfaction.

Consultations to develop the strategy took place over the past 5 months and are now complete.

1,500 Nova Scotians including consumers, families, clinicians , service providers and other key stakeholders provided some valuable input that will be considered during the strategies development.

The Advisory Committee will report back to the Minister with its recommendations for the Strategy in October, and we are looking forward to receiving their advice.

In addition, under Better Care Sooner, District Health Authorities are working with police, emergency departments and mental health programs to provide a crisis response to mental health emergencies.

Collaboration and work on this project is already underway. The ultimate goal is to develop capacity to better address the small number of situations requiring an increased level of intervention.

Also, here in the Capital District, we have a shared care model that provides community based mental health services to families, shared care partners with primary care providers, physicians, schools and community agencies to support children, youth and adults across the lifespan.

This program allows multi-disciplinary staff to provide education, consultation, and individual and group treatment; and connects individuals and families with other services when needed.

This model exists in a number of family practices; however, we would like to see more physicians and mental health service providers make connections on how we best serve families in a collaborative manner, with this expansion of this model in mind.

There are many wonderful people and programs working in mental health across the province right now – many of them in this room.

Those who work in Youth Health Centres in schools, who help **young people** deal with a variety of health issues that affect their lives, whether sexual health, mental health, injury prevention, healthy eating or addictions, suicide prevention and support for youth who are LGBT.

School programs through the IWK and Stan Kutcher, the Sun Life Financial Chair in Adolescent Mental Health.

Those who work with the Mental Health Court -- who help make sure Nova Scotians with mental disorders receive fair and compassionate treatment when they commit criminal offences.

We have Mobile Outreach Street Health that brings mental health care to people wherever they are in Halifax.

We need to do more for First Nations people.

Last fall we were able to get funding through the health authority to set up a help line at Eskasoni. Now there's a memo of understanding with DHAs.

We need to make sure we have the mental health services available to meet the needs of our aging population.

Providing people with mental illness emergency care – that better suits their needs -- is also part of our plan for *Better Care Sooner*.

Whether you are a 13-year-old girl with anxiety due to bullying...

Whether you are a 24-year-old man with Schizophrenia.

Whether you are a 43-year-old man living on the street with alcohol addiction...

Whether you are an 83-year-old grandmother with vascular dementia...

At every age, our goal is optimal health and best quality of life.

It is encouraging to see health care professionals and people living with mental illness coming together to share their stories and suggestions on how to improve mental health care right across the country.

It is meetings like these that help eliminate stigma around mental illness and put us that much closer to finding solutions.

Government supports your work as you collaborate to inform best practices and establish communities of practice by developing evidence-based, innovative and progressive solutions to mental health issues.

We know we still have work to do, but we're pleased with the strong foundation we've laid to date.

Together, we can continue to make a difference for the individuals and families living with mental illness.

Congratulations on the many accomplishments you've achieved in the mental health field within your organizations and communities. I wish you continued success in the future.

Best wishes for a successful conference.