



Mental illness affects one in five Canadians in their lifetime (Health Canada, 2002) but despite the prevalence of mental health issues in the general population, people with mental health needs face multiple barriers to accessing services. These barriers result largely from negative societal attitudes about mental illness and have contributed to lack of access to appropriate treatment and support services and difficulties obtaining employment and housing. Most importantly the stigma surrounding mental health prevents people from sharing their challenges and asking for help.

Based on the results of the 2012 Canadian Community Health Survey – Mental Health (Sunderland & Findlay, 2013), about 17% of the population aged 15 or older reported having a mental health care (MHC) need in 2012. Results from the survey identify four types of perceived MHC needs including counselling, information, medication, and other. The need for counselling was the most prevalent need and also the least likely to be fulfilled. Yet the impact of mental illnesses can be minimized with early recognition and timely treatment.

### IDENTIFYING THE NEED FOR COUNSELLING

According to the 2012 Canadian Community Health Survey (Statistics Canada, 2013), 67% of respondents reported that their needs were met when seeking help for their mental health care needs, however, 12% reported needs that were unmet and the remaining 21% had their needs only partially met.

The results showed that the greatest need for mental health care came from individuals who identified themselves as having a mental health disorder combined with greater amounts of stress and chronic physical conditions. Unfortunately those with higher distress also faced a greater likelihood of having their needs only partially met. The need for counselling across all mental health issues was identified by all respondents in the Canadian Community Health Survey. This finding means that there is an urgent need for counselling services and these services are not reliably reaching the people that need help the most.



CCPA's Talking Can Help website ([talkingcanhelp.ca](http://talkingcanhelp.ca)) is aimed at individuals who are seeking information and support about the profession of counselling and psychotherapy. The public can find information on reasons for seeking counselling, types of therapies and even tips on finding the right therapist for them. This website demystifies therapy and clears many misconceptions that might be keeping some individuals who are considering counselling from going ahead with it. The website raises public awareness of the role of the profession in mental health and wellness and supports informed decision-making when choosing a mental health practitioner.

## BARRIERS TO HAVING MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS MET

Despite the information available through public education, the media, and the Internet, there continues to be a lack of understanding among Canadians about mental illness. Stigma and discrimination is probably the most significant obstacle to the treatment of mental disorders (Hocking, 2003; Neasa Martin & Associates, 2007; Pinfold, Thornicroft, Huxley, & Farmer, 2005); it impacts mental health policies and the distribution of resources, and is the reason that many individuals do not seek treatment. Hocking (2003) found that discrimination affects one's ability to obtain housing, education, employment, and medical care. As a result, social isolation, lack of productivity, and deepening spirals of symptoms form further barriers to recovery. The stigma surrounding mental health prevents people from sharing their challenges and asking for help. Barriers to seeking mental health care are varied with many individuals stating that they prefer to manage their mental health needs on their own (Sunderland & Findlay, 2013). However, others indicate that help is not readily available and they don't know how to go about accessing this type of care. Others refer to the costs of treatment noting that their health insurance plans do not cover mental health.

## IMPACT OF MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS IN CANADA

Canadian studies indicate that the cost of mental health problems to the economy are estimated to be around 50 billion dollars per year and this figure does not include criminal justice system, school, or child welfare costs (Lim, Jacobs, Ohinmaa, Schopflocher, & Dewa, 2008; Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2012). In 2011 it cost Canada about 42.3 billion dollars to provide treatment, care, and support services for people with mental health problems. Long range projections indicated that Canada can expect the costs to exceed 2.5 trillion dollars over the next 30 years (Lim et al., 2008; Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2012). Statistics on the annual productivity impact of mental illness in the workplace are increasing each year from 6.4 billion dollars in 2011 to an estimated 16 billion by 2041 (Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2012).

## ADDRESSING THE BARRIERS: THE CANADIAN COUNSELLING AND PSYCHOTHERAPY ASSOCIATION

The Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association (CCPA) is a national bilingual association providing professional counsellors and psychotherapists with access to exclusive educational programs, certification, professional development and direct contact with professional peers and specialty groups. As part of its advocacy work, CCPA hosts a public website [talkingcanhelp.ca](http://talkingcanhelp.ca). The website is designed to help Canadians overcome some of the barriers that can make seeking mental health support difficult.



## CCC'S ROLE IN THE MENTAL HEALTH SYSTEM

CCPA provides a national certification program for professional counsellors, Canadian Certified Counsellors (CCC), that identifies to the public those counsellors who CCPA recognizes as qualified to provide counselling services in Canada. Obtaining the status of Canadian Certified Counsellor (CCC) includes recognition of standards of professional preparation, continuing education, and a formal code of ethics. As a self-regulating body, CCPA provides advice and discipline for certified members on matters of professional conduct. Key features of CCC include:

- A graduate level degree in counselling or a related professional field.
- Minimum of eight graduate level courses including counselling theories, counselling and communication skills, professional ethics, and a supervised counselling practicum.
- 150 hours of direct client contact supervised by a qualified supervisor.
- Criminal record check including vulnerable sector screening.

  
**COUNSELLING**  
AND PSYCHOTHERAPY

The Public Health Agency of Canada (2013) indicates that mental illnesses are “characterized by alterations in thinking, mood or behaviour (or some combination)” associated with significant distress and impaired functioning over an extended period of time. The symptoms vary from mild to severe depending on the type, the individual, the family and socio-economic environment.

## Definition of counselling:

Counselling is a relational process based upon the ethical use of specific professional competencies to facilitate human change. Counselling addresses wellness, relationships, personal growth, career development, mental health, and psychological illness or distress. The counselling process is characterized by the application of recognized cognitive, affective, expressive, somatic, spiritual, developmental, behavioural, learning, and systemic principles.

(Retrieved from:

<http://www.ccpa-accp.ca/en/the-profession/who-are-counsellors/>)



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