



Open the doors of opportunity for
those people living with schizophrenia

Why Canadian healthcare should change
its thinking about schizophrenia



- 9 Schizophrenia is a treatable brain illness.
- 8 One out of every five homeless Canadians suffers from chronic mental illness.
- 7 New treatments are available for those suffering from schizophrenia.
- 6 Schizophrenia costs Canadians \$4.3 billion per year.
- 5 Most people living with schizophrenia are employable.
- 4 One of every hundred Canadians will suffer from schizophrenia symptoms sometime in their life.
- 3 Schizophrenia is NOT “split” personality.
- 2 You can make a difference.



Simon Adamson

Writer

Defensive Back with the Calgary Colts

Presenter and spokesperson for the Schizophrenia Society

People with schizophrenia are PEOPLE (with schizophrenia)

To find out more about how your business can help directly with employment, mentoring or financial support call:
223-8584 (within the 403 area code)
1-888-685-4004 (outside Calgary)

To learn more information on the illness, treatment strategies or on-going programs ask for the "Handbook for Families."

SCHIZOPHRENIA

OPEN YOUR HEART. OPEN YOUR MIND. OPEN THE DOORS.



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One in 100 people will develop schizophrenia sometime in their life.

In Canada, that's 280,000 people — more than a quarter of a million. And 27,000 in Alberta alone.

But a statistic that is just as staggering is that in Alberta there are just 563 hospital beds for adults with acute psychiatric illness. People with schizophrenia find it very difficult to gain access to beds and services.

Given the astonishing limitation of resources, there are only two alternatives before us:

- Carry on with the status quo (that is, do nothing) in spite of the needs of the mentally ill. This includes homelessness and cruel institutionalization in prisons.
- Open the Doors — To further support the treatment and reintegration of more people with schizophrenia back into society. To do this we must decrease the stigma and discrimination that keep these people from being respected as citizens with the rights and privileges of all others.

Schizophrenia is a TREATABLE brain illness.

Like the lungs or pancreas, the brain is an organ in the body. Dysfunction in cells of the pancreas can result in diabetes. In a similar way, scientists have learned that schizophrenia is an illness that affects the chemistry, structure and function of the brain. *Early treatment is important in controlling schizophrenia.* Unfortunately, many people go for years without seeing a doctor — often because they are afraid of the discrimination that comes with mental illness.

The good news is that there are new medications today that are effective in treating schizophrenia. But medication

is not the whole answer. A supportive, knowledgeable community is an important component for recovery. In addition to medication, there are also national and local support groups, clubhouses and other social programs that will aid recovery. But often those living with schizophrenia need the support to find these resources.

Schizophrenia affects everyone. (Starting with annual Canadian health costs of \$4.3 billion.)

Because many people do not understand schizophrenia or are afraid of those with mental illness, discrimination is very much a problem in our society. If schizophrenia is left untreated, many factors can come into play that lead, for example, to homelessness. In fact, 1 in 5 homeless people in Alberta may suffer from schizophrenia.

By treating schizophrenia early and properly, we could:

- reduce homelessness.
- reduce long term health care and hospitalization costs.
- reduce the number of those with schizophrenia inappropriately held in prisons.

To achieve this requires a commitment on the part of the government and healthcare providers to further open the doors for people suffering from schizophrenia. To date, because those with schizophrenia are often ignored, that support has been lacking. For example, of the \$2.2 billion in direct annual costs arising from schizophrenia (not to mention the nearly equal amount in indirect costs), just five million dollars (or 0.2%) is spent on research. And that's *one twentieth* what is currently spent on legal and judicial costs for those who have gone untreated.

Dean Kernohan

Holds a degree in music from University of Calgary

Violinist, member of a local band & orchestra
29 years old



“Most people don’t understand it is an illness. They say: ‘Can’t you just discipline your thinking?’ But you can’t discipline a virus, cancer cells or a broken leg.”

Understanding schizophrenia is the first step in living with it.

What is life like for those living with schizophrenia? Schizophrenia generally strikes young people in their late teens or early twenties.

In the early stages, people with schizophrenia may find themselves losing the ability to relax, concentrate or sleep. They may start to shut long-time friends out of their lives. Work or school begins to suffer. They may stop bathing. During this time, there may be one or more episodes where they talk in ways that may be difficult to understand or describe unusual perceptions.

Because it affects men and women at such a young age, and because these people are often highly intelligent and creative individuals, they often miss the opportunity to prove themselves in their first job — and miss out on the confidence, self-esteem and financial reward that comes with employment or having their own housing.

Work, Housing, Respect — Getting the basics for a more human existence

In addition to the misinformation presented in the media regarding those with schizophrenia, there is a scarcity of community resources for helping them live normal, productive lives once they have been treated. Without these social supports, the cycle of hopelessness continues and they are forced back into the painful — and costly — marginalization. Among the challenges they face:

- **Housing.** Landlords often refuse to rent to individuals with psychiatric problems.
- **Housing.** Neighborhoods often block mental health residences despite the fact that such residences have not been shown to have adverse effects on the community.
- **Employment.** In the U.S. fewer than 15% of the mentally ill are employed. In 1992, the United Nations adopted resolution 119. This resolution provided for the adoption and dissemination of the “Principles for the Protection of Persons with Mental Illness and for the Improvement of Mental Health Care.” The principles outlined included:
 - Mental illness is a major public health problem.
 - People with mental illness often do not receive appropriate mental health care.
 - Receiving health care for mental illness is a human right.
 - Care should be provided in the least restrictive facilities possible.

Elizabeth MacDonell

Bachelor's degree
in English literature

Plays viola with a
local orchestra

Has lived with
schizophrenia for
18 years



“For ten years I was diagnosed as manic depressive. Then a doctor diagnosed my schizophrenia. I was put on a new medication and it changed my life. Today, I play the viola with a symphony and love the Bach cello suites.”

What can be done at the local level — in the ER

Those suffering an immediate crisis often encounter strong stigma and discrimination at the front line of treatment, the Emergency Room. To help provide them with appropriate care, it is important that:

- No jokes or negative off-hand remarks be made to the person who may already be suffering from paranoid delusions.
- The ER should have a private room or area where the person can be interviewed separate from those being treated for physical ailments.
- The interviewing nurse or doctor listens — without prejudice — to the report from the person, which may have bizarre or disturbing details.

What can be done on the governmental level?

Legislation and policy to reduce discrimination in:

- health care.
- housing.
- employment.
- income.

Alvin Vieira

Painter

Sculptor

Has lived with schizophrenia for 16 years



“My father was glad to hear the diagnosis. He and my mother had lived with my odd behavior for years. He said: ‘At least, now we know what it is and can face it.’”