

SSC'S ADVOCACY TOOLKIT

Tools and tips to help you advocate with key stakeholders and decision makers on behalf of those living with early psychosis and schizophrenia and their families.

ADVOCACY & SSC



ADVOCACY & SSC

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ADVOCACY & SSC

A SUMMARY

The Schizophrenia Society of Canada is the national organization representing those individuals and families affected by early psychosis and schizophrenia. Our goal as a national organization is to ensure that we advocate for a recovery-oriented mental health system that addresses the issues associated with mental illness, especially “enduring” mental illnesses. This means access to timely and appropriate care based upon “a whole person perspective”: the biological, psychological, social, and economical needs of the person, as well as meaningful education and engagement of family and those in the person’s “circle of support.”

SSC has made great strides in recent years to raise awareness about, and advocate for, individuals who live with early psychosis and schizophrenia, but there is much more to be done. SSC is committed to building an inclusive Canada where everyone has the right to appropriate person-centered care, treatment, psychosocial rehabilitation, and psychological supports from a recovery lens within the least restrictive environment. Our advocacy success depends heavily on our supporters delivering a single, united, and strong message to decision makers. This is where you come in! By ensuring your personal voice is heard alongside SSC’s continuous national efforts, you can help move things forward quicker and contribute from a grassroots perspective to affect change from all levels.

Access to mental health services continues to be an issue of broad public concern and stakeholders at all levels are increasingly responsive to the need for improved access to mental illness and mental health care. You are an important part of the solution and can assist in destigmatization mental illness and ensuring there is mental health/illness awareness and education, early intervention, and access to interventions and those resources which will help a person to regain their life, a life of satisfaction. SSC’s mission speaks to this: “Build a Canada where people living with early psychosis and schizophrenia achieve their potential.” Help us spread this message!

In joining this grassroots movement, you will not be alone. SSC will be here to support you if you have any questions or require assistance in reaching out to elected officials and other political decision makers, unions, employers and insurance companies.

This kit explains the challenges we currently face, as well as our recommendations to address these issues. This kit also provides instructions for contacting stakeholders, key messaging, how to prepare for your meeting, and post-meeting actions. We look forward to working with each and every one of you as we pull together to raise our advocacy efforts to the highest level.

WHY ADVOCATE?

Ensure your voice is heard and understood by key decision makers across the country

A photograph of three people in a meeting. On the left, a woman with dark curly hair is smiling and looking towards the right. In the center, a man with short dark hair is looking towards the right. On the right, a woman with long dark hair is seen from the side, looking towards the other two. They are in a room with bookshelves in the background.

Talking
can help

#TALKINGCANHELP

CONNECT WITH A HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONAL AND PEER SUPPORT

OUR EFFORTS

SSC is continuously spreading awareness and education about individuals and families living with early psychosis and schizophrenia. Each year, we submit a pre-budget submission to the federal government outlining our primary recommendations that highlight how we believe access to resources and treatment can be improved in Canada. We also meet with elected officials to express our concerns and share our ideas.

A successful advocacy effort can take some time to produce results.

**BUT EACH TIME YOU SPEAK ON BEHALF OF YOUR CHOSEN ISSUE, YOU RAISE
AWARENESS AND BUILD SUPPORT.**

**VISIT WWW.SCHIZOPHRENIA.CA TO LEARN MORE ABOUT
OUR ADVOCACY EFFORTS**



FACTS ABOUT EARLY PSYCHOSIS

- The word “psychosis” is used to describe conditions that affect the mind, where there has been some loss of contact with reality.
- Psychosis often begins when a person is in their late teens to mid-twenties.
- Psychosis can be a symptom of a mental illness or a physical condition.
- Psychosis can be caused by some medications, alcohol or drug abuse.
- Three out of 100 people will experience psychosis at some time in their lives.
- Psychosis can include hallucinations (seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting or feeling something that is not real).
- Psychosis can include delusions (believing in something that is not real even when presented with facts).
- Psychosis can include disordered thoughts and speech.
- Psychosis affects people from all walks of life.
- One illness characterized by psychosis is “schizophrenia.”



FACTS ABOUT SCHIZOPHRENIA

- Schizophrenia is a severe mental disorder affecting 1% of the populations. That is approximately 350,000 Canadians.
- Schizophrenia affects a person's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. This disorder can affect a person's perception of reality, social interactions, and thought processes. Symptoms of schizophrenia may include hallucinations—which may be visual or auditory (seeing things that aren't there, hearing voices)—delusions, cognitive impairment manifesting as an unusual way of thinking or disorganized speech, and difficulty in social relationships.
- Many factors that are related to the development of schizophrenia include, but are not limited to, genetics, trauma and drug use.
- Symptoms impact both the individual and their loved ones long-term.
- Schizophrenia can adversely impact a person's social and occupational functioning. The condition makes it challenging for the individual to work, finish school and have meaningful relationships.
- People with schizophrenia are 2-3 times more likely to die early than the general population. This is often due to preventable physical diseases, such as cardiovascular disease, metabolic disease, and respiratory disease.
- Stigma, discrimination and violation of human rights of people with schizophrenia is common.
- Early intervention can have a significant positive impact on people with schizophrenia. The earlier treatment is obtained, the more likely there will be a good outcome and positive future.
- An array of bio-psycho-social recovery-oriented treatments of schizophrenia are effective.
- Though schizophrenia carries a heavy burden, not everyone with the condition is the same. If you have met one person with schizophrenia, you have just met one person. This is due to the heterogeneity of schizophrenia.
- Facilitation of supported housing and supported employment are effective management strategies for people with schizophrenia.
- Recovery, living beyond the limitations of a mental illness with hope, purpose, and meaning is possible.
- The pandemic has created unprecedented global challenges and disheartening recent data (Nemani et al, 2021) show that a diagnosis of schizophrenia ranks only behind age as the greatest risk factor for COVID-19 death.



MENTAL HEALTH BY THE NUMBERS

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development reports the direct and indirect costs of mental health can exceed 4% of GDP, which in Canada is approaching \$70 billion a year.

By age **40**, **50% of Canadians** will have / had a mental illness.

1 in 5 Canadians experience a mental health illness or issue annually and 1 in 3 in their lifetime.

15% of the population reports feeling psychological distress since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, compared to 2% previously

Mental health problems and illnesses are the **leading causes of disability** in Canada, affecting almost 7 million working age adults.

500,000+ Canadians miss work in any given week due to mental health problems.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shifted many workplaces' structure and **telework has contributed to employees' anxiety levels**, especially for those who have to juggle both work and family responsibilities daily

Mental health issues account for **70% of all short-and long-term disability costs**. Presenteeism is reported to be many times higher.

\$20 billion in costs to Canadian employers annually:

LOST PRODUCTIVITY

- Absenteeism – casual, short- and long-term
- Presenteeism (being present but unproductive at work due to illness, anxiety, etc.)

DIRECT COSTS

- Benefit plan

EMPLOYEE TURNOVER

Burn-out is now classified as an occupational phenomenon resulting from chronic workplace stress.





KEY MESSAGING IMPROVING THE MENTAL HEALTH OF ALL CANADIANS

Here's our messaging based on audience.

WHAT ARE WE ADVOCATING FOR?

- A Mental Health Parity Act which addresses equal funding for mental health care and substance use care; equal, that is, with physical health care.
- A full array of publicly funded and evidenced-based mental health and substance use programs, services, and supports that are available to Canadians on an equitable basis, when and where they need it that extends beyond traditional hospital and physician setting as set out in the Canada Health Act.
- Ensuring persons with enduring mental health problems and mental illnesses have the right to appropriate person-centered care, treatment, psychosocial rehabilitation, and psychological supports from a recovery lens within the least restrictive environment with the goal of social inclusion in the community.
- Continuing public education and training for health care and mental health professionals that addresses the various levels of government (federal, provincial, and territorial), national mental health organizations, the voluntary sector, and individuals working together toward a mental health system that improves the quality of life for those living with a mental illness and their families and friends.
- Continuing public education that addresses the prejudice, stigma, and discrimination associated with early psychosis and schizophrenia with the goal of creating a more understanding, sensitive, compassionate, and inclusive society.



POLITICAL ADVOCACY SEEKING SUPPORT FROM GOVERNMENT & ELECTED OFFICIALS

As you know, governments have paid great attention to the importance of health care as an issue that is close to voters' hearts. Traditionally, however, politicians have focused more on the stakeholder concerns of physicians, nurses and pharmacists among the more high-profile health professions. The challenge for SSC is to maintain a strong voice for those actually living with early psychosis and schizophrenia which includes both the individual and family.

“Nothing about us without us!” We must all work together to keep governments focused on mental health care and recognize it as a priority for all Canadians!

While meetings in Ottawa are an extremely important part of SSC's advocacy strategy, it is equally important that you make an effort to meet with your local stakeholders, including Members of Parliament (MPs), Members of Provincial Parliament (MPPs), Members of the National Assembly (MNAs), Members of the House of Assembly (MHAs) or Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) during their time in the constituency. SSC has heard repeatedly that external stakeholders like members of provincial legislature and parliament would prefer to hear directly from their constituents and members of various mental health organizations. Local community members are able to provide their elected officials with a more community-specific perspective on issues related to mental health. Our advocacy success depends heavily on you getting involved and delivering a united, and strong message to decision makers.

SSC acknowledges that federal investments have been made in areas related to mental illness and mental health, but that there are further concrete actions that can be taken to better the lives and productivity of Canadians.



POLITICAL ADVOCACY CONTACTING YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS

CONTACT YOUR ELECTED OFFICIAL TODAY

An important first step to meeting with your elected official is determining exactly who he/she is. By visiting ourcommons.ca and inserting your business and residential postal codes, you can easily identify and locate the MP or MPs you should be approaching at the federal level. At the federal level and you can find your provincial MPPs or MLAs through your provincial government's website.

REQUESTING A MEETING

This kit includes a sample letter. Please remember that personalized letters from constituents (you as a voter) have the greatest impact! For a politician, a call from a constituent makes a real impact. Note that officials should be making themselves available to meet with their constituents, so make sure you mention that you are a constituent when you are calling to make the appointment. The letter includes a request to meet with your elected official to discuss related issues. If you are able to secure an in-person or phone meeting, a member of the SSC staff will help you to prepare, if needed. Prior to meeting with your local elected official, please review the enclosed Meeting Guide to assist in your preparation. You will also receive preparation support by phone from SSC and our government relations firm, Impact Public Affairs. Once you have concluded the meeting, please fill out the [debriefing questionnaire](#).



POLITICAL ADVOCACY

CONTACTING GOVERNMENT ELECTED OFFICIALS

Same title & subtitle

Sample letter text:

{Insert address}

{Insert date}

Dear {insert name}:

As a constituent in your riding and a mental health advocate in your community, I want to take this opportunity to share with you the vital role that the Schizophrenia Society of Canada (SSC) can play in Canada's healthcare system and the important contributions we make to the mental health and well-being of all Canadians.

I am currently the {insert relationship to early psychosis and schizophrenia, i.e. (?) person living with MI, family member or friend, etc.}. SSC exists to "Build a Canada where people living with early psychosis and schizophrenia achieve their potential." This is possible with early intervention and recovery focused mental health services.

While mental health care providers are an integral part of the primary health care continuum, the voices of those living with early psychosis and schizophrenia, along with their families must be heard in improving and transforming our mental health system. Currently, navigating the mental health system can be very difficult! Timely and appropriate access to mental health and substance use programs, services, and supports remain underfunded and difficult to access. Post-hospitalization supports and services in the community, like individual and family peer support can hardly be found. Because early psychosis and schizophrenia are more than biological illness, increasing psychological supports are important to the recovery process.

Three percent of the population will experience psychosis. Over 350,000 Canadians are living with schizophrenia. It's not just individuals impacted, it's their friends and families too. To make matters worse, we still have to combat the greatest myth about schizophrenia. Most Canadians still believe that people diagnosed with schizophrenia are dangerous. Such misunderstanding prevent many people from getting help. Early psychosis and schizophrenia are treatable and recovery, that is, living beyond the limitations of a mental illness with hope, purpose and meaning are possible. That's why we recommend that the Federal Government improve access to mental health care through a Mental Health Parity Act. Mental health parity describes the equal funding of mental health conditions and substance use disorders.

Given the importance of mental health, and the increase we have seen during COVID-19, it is crucial that the Federal Government create and evaluate measurement performance for spending for primary care for those living with schizophrenia and other psychotic disorders. This is especially relevant during the COVID-19 pandemic as those living with schizophrenia are twice more likely to contract the COVID-19 virus. All Canadians benefit from better access to mental health services.

As a constituent, I would greatly appreciate the opportunity to meet with you to discuss these important issues in further detail. I can be reached at {insert phone number}. I look forward to collaborating as we build a relationship together.

Sincerely,

{Name}

{Signature and Title}



POLITICAL ADVOCACY

WHAT TO DO BEFORE & AFTER

BEFORE THE MEETING

Look at the official's biography and related information online:

- What party?
- Any particular interests that may be relevant (positively or negatively)?
- What parliamentary committee(s) do they belong to?
- Possible knowledge of the counseling/psychotherapy/mental health industry?
- If attending with someone else, discuss who will say what. For example, if with another member, one may be comfortable with a particular issue.
- Prepare what you will say. Even if the meeting is scheduled for 30 minutes, prepare for 15 minutes as the MP may be late or have to leave early. It is better to not be caught off guard by such a (common) situation.
- Read the key messages provided in this Guide.



AFTER THE MEETING

- Complete the De-briefing Questionnaire after the meeting and return it by email to amelia@impactcanada.com, along with a photo if you have one so it can be posted for social media purposes.
- At any time feel free to call Amelia Chant at Impact Public Affairs (343-543-7741) if you have questions or concerns, or to report good news.
- If the MP asks for additional information, please ask SSC. We'll provide it so that you can forward it to the MP/MPP/MHA/MNA/MLA.
- Send a thank you e-mail or letter.



POLITICAL ADVOCACY

WHAT TO DO DURING THE MEETING

1. Most government representatives will afford you only 15-30 minutes of time, so you should be brief and to the point. If there are two or more individuals at the meeting, you should decide on a principal spokesperson to handle the main points. Keep in mind, however, that all individuals should feel free to comment at any time.
2. Open your meetings by thanking the individual for having taken the time from his/her busy schedule to meet with you and discuss these important issues.
3. Introduce yourself by giving your name, title and the organization you represent.
4. Say a few words about the purpose and aim of your meeting.
5. Do not hesitate to share personal anecdotes related to the topic of your visit with your MP. They can be very receptive to information with a personal touch.
6. Share a local or regional article (or story) about SSC with your MP, if an appropriate one is available.
7. Briefly summarize the key points on the issue(s) you are raising. Make sure to add that if he/she has any questions, to not hesitate to either personally contact you or SSC directly.
8. Remember, SSC's specific request is that the government Government improve access to mental health care through a Mental Health Parity Act. Mental health care supports should be broadly inclusive of the unique and distinctive needs of individuals living with early psychosis and schizophrenia.
9. If possible, have a photo taken of your meeting with the MP and share it with SSC (email, Twitter, Facebook).
10. Leave behind a SSC information package (to be provided by SSC).
11. Complete the Debriefing Questionnaire after the meeting and return it by email to amelia@impactcanada.com.
12. Contribute ideas for a thank you letter which will be prepared by SSC (ex. meeting highlights, next steps).



POLITICAL ADVOCACY GOVERNMENT ELECTED OFFICIALS DEBRIEFING QUESTIONNAIRE

Your name: _____

Business address: _____

Your email: _____

Your phone number: _____

Name of MP you met with: _____

MP's political party: _____

Date of meeting: _____

I found this individual to be:

- Demonstrated a real concern for improving our mental health system
- Aware of the specific issues facing Canadians living with early psychosis and schizophrenia
- Awareness of what mental health parity is.
- Made a tangible commitment to address my concerns
- Interested in more information

COMMENTS AND FOLLOW-UP

Please complete and scan to Amelia Chant by email at amelia@imapctcanada.ca



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR INFORMATION, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

NEED MORE GUIDANCE?

Access our free recorded webinar, we'll walk you through everything!
Direct any questions to amelia@impactcanada.com or (343)-543-7741.

KEEP UP TO DATE WITH OUR ADVOCACY EFFORTS AND SUPPORT US BY FOLLOWING US ON FACEBOOK & TWITTER



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