

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.



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DOCUMENT UNDER REVIEW **This toolkit is being updated. Some contact details, statistics and named programs referenced here may be out of date.*

A Summary

The Schizophrenia Society of Canada is the national organization representing those individuals and families affected by early psychosis and schizophrenia. Our goal is to advocate for a recovery oriented mental health system that addresses the biological, psychological, social, and economic needs of the person, as well as meaningful education and engagement of family and 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. Our advocacy success depends heavily on our supporters delivering a single, united, strong message to decision makers. This is where you come in!

Access to mental health services continues to be an issue of broad public concern. You are an important part of the solution and can assist in destigmatizing mental illness and ensuring early intervention and access to resources. SSC's mission: "Build a Canada where people living with early psychosis and schizophrenia achieve their potential."

In joining this grassroots movement, you will not be alone. SSC will support you in reaching out to elected officials, unions, employers and insurance companies.

Why advocate? Ensure your voice is heard and understood by key decision makers across the country.

#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 for improving access to resources and treatment 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 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

Note: several statistics reference pandemic era conditions and should be checked against SSC's current data.

- Schizophrenia is a severe mental disorder affecting approximately 1% of the population — about 350,000 Canadians.
- Schizophrenia affects a person's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, including perception of reality, social interactions, and thought processes. Symptoms may include hallucinations, delusions, cognitive impairment, and disorganized speech.
- Many factors relate to the development of schizophrenia, including but 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, making it challenging to work, finish school and have meaningful relationships.
- People with schizophrenia are 2 to 3 times more likely to die early, often due to preventable physical diseases.
- Stigma, discrimination and violation of human rights of people with schizophrenia is common.
- Early intervention can have a significant positive impact — the earlier treatment is obtained, the more likely a good outcome.
- An array of bio-psycho-social recovery oriented treatments of schizophrenia are effective.
- Facilitation of supported housing and supported employment are effective management strategies.
- Recovery, living beyond the limitations of a mental illness with hope, purpose, and meaning, is possible.

Mental Health By The Numbers

Note: figures should be reconfirmed against SSC's current source data; several are from pandemic era reporting.

- OECD reports direct and indirect costs of mental health can exceed 4% of GDP — in Canada, reported to approach \$70 billion a year.
- By age 40, roughly 50% of Canadians will have or had a mental illness.
- 1 in 5 Canadians experience a mental health issue annually, and 1 in 3 in their lifetime.
- Mental health problems are among the leading causes of disability in Canada, affecting millions of working age adults.
- 500,000+ Canadians miss work in any given week due to mental health problems.
- Mental health issues account for a significant share of short and long term disability costs, with presenteeism reported to be many times higher again.

Costs to Canadian employers annually include:

- Lost productivity — absenteeism (casual, short and long term) and presenteeism
- Direct costs — benefit plan spending
- Employee turnover — burnout, an occupational phenomenon from chronic workplace stress



KEY MESSAGING

Improving the mental health of all Canadians

Note: confirm this advocacy ask reflects SSC's current pre-budget submission before use.

What are we advocating for?

- A Mental Health Parity Act which addresses equal funding for mental health care and substance use care, equal with physical health care.
- A full array of publicly funded and evidence based mental health and substance use programs, services, and supports available equitably, extending beyond traditional hospital and physician settings.
- Ensuring persons with enduring mental health problems have the right to person centered care, treatment, psychosocial rehabilitation, and psychological supports, with the goal of social inclusion.
- Continuing public education and training for health care and mental health professionals across all levels of government, national organizations, and the voluntary sector.
- Continuing public education addressing prejudice, stigma, and discrimination, toward a more understanding, sensitive, compassionate, and inclusive society.



Seeking support from government & elected officials



As you know, governments have paid great attention to the importance of health care, but politicians have traditionally focused more on physicians, nurses and pharmacists. SSC's challenge is to maintain a strong voice for those actually living with early psychosis and schizophrenia, including both 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 extremely important, it is equally important to meet local MPs, MPPs, MNAs, MHAs or MLAs during their time in the constituency. Elected officials prefer to hear directly from constituents and members of mental health organizations. Our advocacy success depends heavily on you getting involved.

Contacting your elected officials

Contact your elected official today

An important first step is determining exactly who represents you. Visit ourcommons.ca and enter your postal code to find your federal MP. Find provincial MPPs or MLAs through your provincial government's website.

Requesting a meeting

A sample letter follows on the next page. Personalized letters from constituents have the greatest impact — mention that you are a constituent when calling to make the appointment. If you secure a meeting, review the Meeting Guide in this toolkit and reach out to SSC directly for support preparing.



Sample letter to elected officials

{Insert address} {Insert date}

Dear {insert name}:

As a constituent in your riding and a mental health advocate in your community, I want to share the vital role the Schizophrenia Society of Canada (SSC) plays in Canada's healthcare system.

I am currently the {insert relationship to early psychosis and schizophrenia}. 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 services.

Approximately 3% of the population will experience psychosis, and over 350,000 Canadians live with schizophrenia. That is why we recommend the Federal Government improve access to mental health care through a Mental Health Parity Act — equal funding of mental health and substance use conditions with physical health care.

As a constituent, I would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you. I can be reached at {insert phone number}.

Sincerely,

{Name}

{Signature and Title}

What to do before & after the meeting

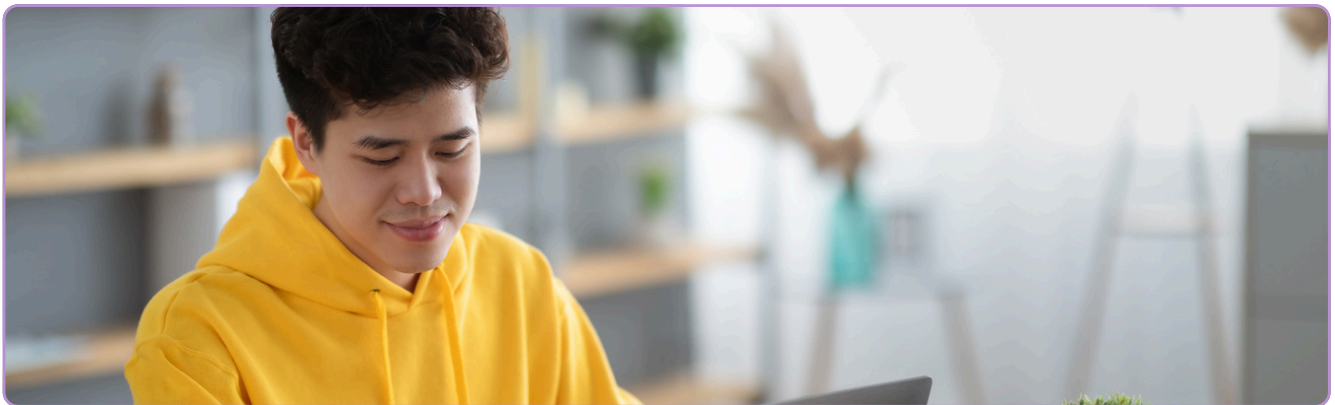
Before the meeting

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 or mental health industry?
- If attending with someone else, discuss who will say what.
- Prepare what you will say, even for a short meeting.
- Read the key messages provided in this guide.

After the meeting

- Share your outcomes and any follow-up requests with SSC directly.
- If the MP asks for additional information, please ask SSC. We will provide it so you can forward it on.
- Send a thank you email or letter.



What to do during the meeting

1. Most reps allow only 15–30 minutes — be brief. If two or more attend, decide on a principal spokesperson.
2. Open by thanking the individual for their time.
3. Introduce yourself: name, title, organization.
4. Say a few words about the purpose of your meeting.
5. Share personal anecdotes — they land well with a personal touch.
6. Share a local or regional article about SSC, if available.
7. Briefly summarize your key points; invite follow-up questions to you or SSC.
8. Remember the ask: a Mental Health Parity Act, inclusive of early psychosis and schizophrenia needs.
9. If possible, get a photo and share it with SSC.
10. Leave behind an SSC information package.
11. Contribute ideas for a thank you letter, prepared by SSC.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For information, guidance and support

Need more guidance? Please reach out to SSC directly for support preparing for your advocacy work.

Keep up to date with our advocacy efforts and support us by following SSC on social media:

- Facebook: /SchizophreniaSocietyCanada
- Instagram: @schizophreniacanada

