

## **What is mental health?**

Mental health means striking a balance in all aspects of one's life: social, physical, spiritual, economic and mental. Everyone's personal balance is unique and the challenge is to stay mentally healthy by keeping the right balance. Mental health is as important as physical health.

## **What is mental illness?**

A mental illness is a health problem that significantly affects how a person thinks, behaves and interacts with other people (or some combination thereof) associated with distress and/or impaired functioning.

## **Who is affected?**

Mental illness is increasingly recognized as a serious and growing problem. It is estimated that 1 in 5 Canadians will develop a mental illness at some time in their lives. Many more individuals such as family, friends and colleagues are also affected.

- Mental illness affects people of all ages, educational and income levels, and cultures.
- Approximately 8% of adults will experience major depression at some time in their lives.
- About 1% of Canadians will experience bipolar disorder (or "manic depression").

## **What causes it?**

- A complex interplay of genetic, biological, personality and environmental factors causes mental illnesses.
- Almost one half (49%) of those who feel they have suffered from depression or anxiety have never gone to see a doctor about this problem.
- Stigma or discrimination attached to mental illnesses presents a serious barrier, not only to diagnosis and treatment but also to acceptance in the community.
- Mental illnesses can be treated effectively.

Mental illnesses are of different types and degrees of severity. Some of the major types are:

anxiety, depression, schizophrenia, bipolar mood disorder, personality disorders, eating disorders.

These illnesses may also be referred to as a mental disorder, mental impairment or psychiatric disability. (*Canadian Mental Health Association*)

People need to know that they do not have to suffer in silence or alone. Approximately 15 years ago there was a strong group of local women I was privileged to know and work alongside who arranged an "information road show". We would go to different organizations and interest groups to speak about mental illness. During this time information and resources were extremely limited. One of the main objectives of the group was to "de-stigmatize" the popular opinion that mental illness did not exist, or "it would never happen to me". No one is exempt from this invisible illness, and it is not an illness that you sign up for - it is as legitimate as diabetes or any other illness. Our group stayed together for several years and we all felt great about getting this important information out there.

Fast forward to today, it is incredible how so many people, such as Clara, have come forward to spread the word that mental illness does exist in our communities. Collectively we **can** make a difference to help the 49% of Canadians make that appointment with their family doctor, or reach out to someone they trust. **Please know you are not alone.**