

## Fundamental Flaws in "Not Criminally Responsible Reform Act" Will Set Back Mental Health without Increasing Public Safety

Mental health groups call for collaboration with government and victims groups to amend bill that is "too important to rush"

<http://www.newswire.ca/en/story/1160459/fundamental-flaws-in-not-criminally-responsible-reform-act-will-set-back-mental-health-without-increasing-public-safety>

OTTAWA, May 7, 2013 /CNW/ - While Canadians mark Mental Health Week, the government's Bill C-54, the Not Criminally Responsible Reform Act, is moving forward with fundamental flaws that will set back progress made in understanding mental health and mental illness, an alliance of national mental health organizations warned today.

"We understand the need to protect Canadians from individuals who commit violent crimes," said Chris Summerville, Alliance Facilitator and CEO of the Schizophrenia Society of Canada at a news conference on Parliament Hill. "However, this bill, as it is currently written, will not do this. What this bill has done is tell Canadians that they should be afraid of people with a mental illness."

Summerville added the vast majority of people with a mental illness will never commit any type of crime, let alone a serious one, and that recidivism rates of individuals found not criminally responsible on account of a mental disorder are much lower than rates among individuals found guilty of a crime.

"The mental health community in Canada has made important strides in reducing the stigma associated with mental illness. We are concerned that in its present form, Bill C-54 will negatively impact the lives of people found Not Criminally Responsible on account of a Mental Disorder and unjustifiably increase the stigma towards people with mental illness," said Peter Coleridge, National CEO, Canadian Mental Health Association. "Too many elements of the bill are simply not evidence based and will not result in the changes that Canadians and victims would like to see from such a bill. This issue is much too important to rush."

"The mental health community was not part of the creation of Bill C-54," said Dr. Paul Fedoroff, Member Board of Directors, Canadian Psychiatric Association and President, Canadian Academy of Psychiatry and the Law. "Today, during Mental Health Week, we publicly offer not only to work with the government in creating an effective bill, but to also work with victims groups. We are confident that Canadians expect their government to work with the mental health community in crafting a bill that effectively and fairly deals with people with mental disorders in a way that serves everyone's interests."

The government's Bill C-54 proposes amendments to the Criminal Code dealing with restrictions for people found not criminally responsible on account of a mental disorder. Given the significance of passing such changes, Canada's mental health community has come together to form a working alliance in an effort to strengthen their voice on this critical matter, which is of vital importance to the mental health community and understanding mental illness. The alliance includes:

Mood Disorders Society of Canada

Canadian Mental Health Association

Canadian Psychiatric Association

Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention

Canadian Association of Social Workers

National Network for Mental Health

Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

Canadian Psychological Association

Schizophrenia Society of Canada (representing all Schizophrenia Societies across Canada)

SOURCE: Schizophrenia Society of Canada

For further information:

For more information or to book interviews, contact:

Chris Summerville

Alliance Facilitator and Chief Executive Officer, Schizophrenia Society of Canada

Office: (204) 786-1616

Mobile: (204) 223-9158

Email: [chris@schizophrenia.ca](mailto:chris@schizophrenia.ca)

Mike Storeshaw

Hill+Knowlton Strategies

Office: (613) 786-9976

Mobile: (613) 314-3048

Email: [mike.storeshaw@hkstrategies.ca](mailto:mike.storeshaw@hkstrategies.ca)