

Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention: President's Report 2006

Like the first heat of a summer morning, you can feel a new season beginning. As President of the Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention, I want all of us to recognize the growing momentum for suicide prevention and be ready to act. First, let's review the progress being made and then ready ourselves for action.

During our Annual Conference in Ottawa, October 17th, 2005, the previous Health Minister, Honorable Ujjal Dosanjh proclaimed that "Over the next year or two, I want to have the best strategy in the world to deal with mental health issues..." Of course with the change in Government, the Minister was not able to achieve this important declaration. However, many others are taking up the banner and real changes are occurring. In May 2006, the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology released their final report entitled "Out of the Shadows at Last." The report's recommendation 106 (page 71) reads "That the federal government support efforts of the Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention and other organizations working to develop a national suicide prevention strategy." I am very gratified to have this influential report specifically call for a national suicide prevention strategy and to place our organization at the leading edge of this crucial transformation. As members of CASP, we must be at the ready to lead the planning and implementation of our Blueprint for a Canadian National Suicide Prevention Strategy.

Change is all around us. The Province of Alberta has launched "A Call to Action. The Alberta Suicide Prevention Strategy." Alberta has, for over two decades, been a beacon for initiatives in suicide prevention and has impacted the development of suicide prevention strategies world-wide. With the development of the Alberta Suicide Prevention Strategy, the province will continue its important leadership in suicide prevention. In Manitoba, a provincial committee with representatives from Regional Health Authorities, Self-Help groups, consumers, family members, First Nations and Métis communities have developed "A Framework for Suicide Prevention Planning in Manitoba" (March 2006). The Province of New Brunswick has completed a landmark study of 102 cases of suicide and documented the importance of preceding factors such as depression, dramatic increases in alcohol use, marital difficulties, loss of physical autonomy and loss or potential loss of freedom, including incarceration. Currently, Part 2 of the research is extending the investigation to those who attempt suicide. The Canadian Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health has provided crucial leadership calling for a national action plan on mental illness and mental health. Many initiatives are happening as the National Aboriginal Youth Suicide Prevention Strategy moves toward full implementation. The evidence of change is everywhere around us.

As members of CASP and leaders in the struggle to prevent suicide, we must all be ready to act. We need to be advocating and communicating our message clearly. To the Federal Government, we have three key requirements; we need Federal leadership in developing our national strategy, we need collaboration at all levels of government and we need adequate funding to implement and coordinate the national strategy. We need to implement, in all our communities, the goals and objectives of the Blueprint; from reducing access to lethal means, to supporting those bereaved by suicide to promoting awareness about suicide prevention. Let us be active in having others join in the creation of change; join in our survivors listserv started and operated by Bonny Ball, join and participate with us in Toronto for the CASP Conference 2006 October 25-27, 2006 (www.suicideconference2006.ca) and join our voices to exclaim that we can prevent suicide and our prospects for change are now.