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# Understanding Supported Employment Programs in Canada

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Recognized as an evidence-based practice, supported employment programs have been researched extensively in other parts of the world, including Asia and Europe. Until recently, there had been no similar research conducted on supported employment programs in Canada.

Dr. Marc Corbière, Professor with the Rehabilitation School, University of Sherbrooke is the lead researcher of an ongoing multi-year pan-Canadian evaluation of supported employment programs, funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR). In a project newsletter, the researchers state their overall objective: “With this study, we hope to improve the quality of life for people with severe mental disorders and their families.”<sup>1</sup>

Corbière points out that results of the study will help, “to understand the implementation of supported employment programs in Canada, and to understand the most significant elements which help people get and maintain employment.” The study will also make it possible to compare what is happening in Canada with other parts of the world.

Researchers are conducting the study with 22 agencies that offer supported employment programs for people with serious mental illness in Ontario, Québec and British Columbia.

The first phase of the three-phase study is now complete and identifies six distinct profiles of supported employment programs in the three provinces. These six profiles vary by the degree to which they adhere to the supported employment model. Corbière points out that with the implementation of the supported employment program in different Canadian contexts, the model has been necessarily adapted, which can affect vocational outcomes. Findings from this first phase have been published in the June, 2009 online edition of the Community Mental Health Journal and will be published in an upcoming hard copy edition.

Researchers will conduct an organizational analysis in the second phase, to better understand how dynamics between major stakeholders have influenced the implementation of different supported employment programs in Canada, and to describe the diversity of

## Who is OMHAKEN?

OMHAKEN's vision is to create and share the knowledge that will build a better mental health and addictions system in Ontario. The purpose of the network is to enhance the capacity of researchers, consumers, families, providers, planners and policy makers to collaboratively engage in the production, communication and utilization of health services research and evaluation. OMHAKEN provides a network structure for mental health and addiction stakeholders to interact with each other for the purpose of knowledge exchange.

OMHAKEN is supported by the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-term Care. OMHAKEN is on [web!](#)

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supported employment programs for people with severe mental illness. Different aspects will be looked at, such as components of supported employment programs and their distinct philosophies.

The last phase will identify program aspects that help people find and maintain employment, including program features and characteristics of clients who take part. This will help to identify which supported employment components can be modified, omitted or added without affecting people's chances of finding and maintaining work.

## Engaging with stakeholders

Throughout the study, the research team is engaging with partner agencies, their staff, and co-investigators. The research team provides updates on participant recruitment, where presentations on the study have been made, and upcoming events, primarily through a newsletter.

By maintaining contact with stakeholders throughout the course of the study, the research team is facilitating the development of relationships amongst researchers and stakeholders across Canada. With this in mind, Dr. Corbière plans to host a meeting in Montréal at the end of the study in 2012 with all partners and researchers, to share results, and to provide another platform to communicate with stakeholders and to continue building a supported employment network.

Corbière comments, "[We] don't have a lot of supported employment programs in Canada,...[so it's] important to create ...[relationships] between people, to talk about the future of supported employment programs."

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"[The] other target is to maybe change the model of supported employment, to improve the program based on the evaluation." Corbière continues, "For several employment specialists and directors, it is interesting to note that supported employment programs are not perceived as the only way of working. Other approaches are necessary to help people with a severe mental illness get and maintain employment such as social enterprises. In other words, different approaches can co-exist depending on participants' needs."

Other researchers on the study include:

- Dr. Daniel Reinharz, University of Laval
- Dr. Eric Latimer, McGill University
- Dr. Bonnie Kirsh, University of Toronto
- Dr. Tania Lecomte, University of Montréal
- Dr. Paula Goering, University of Toronto
- Dr. Elliott Goldner, Simon Fraser University

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The team is supported by three research coordinators, in Ontario, Québec and British Columbia.

For additional information about the study, please contact Dr. Marc Corbière, at: [marc.corbiere@USherbrooke.ca](mailto:marc.corbiere@USherbrooke.ca)

**Reference:** 1. Autumn 2009. No. 3, Pan Canadian Analysis of Programmatic, Organizational and Individual Aspects of Supported Employment Programs Implementation Newsletter.

# We Can Do It!

## *An Overview of the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Canadian Congress on Mental Health and Addiction in the Workplace*

“We can do it” was the catch-phrase for the recent 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Canadian Congress for Research on Mental Health and Addiction in the Workplace. As the leading Canadian forum of its kind dedicated to improving the working environment and mental health of employees, this year’s Congress was a great success. The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health’s (CAMH) Work and Well-being Research and Evaluation Program hosted the 4<sup>th</sup> Congress, at the invitation of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR).

The CIHR mandate for the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Congress was to provide delegates the opportunity to share information on the latest research and evidence-based interventions in five main areas: (1) Workplace prevention and promotion, (2) Disability management and return to work, (3) Diagnosis and treatment, (4) Stigma/discrimination, and (5) Workplace mental health and addiction policies. Within these five streams, over 80 presentations were given at this two and a half day event – each one evaluated and selected by the Congress Scientific Committee based on scientific rigor. In total, close to two hundred delegates attended from across Canada and internationally. With business leaders, media representatives, and leading researchers present, the Congress was able to introduce a broader public health perspective in addressing issues around mental health and addiction in the workplace. The Congress also attracted and brought together a variety of stakeholders – including employers, unions, clinicians, disability management specialists, researchers, human resource professionals, and workers - all in a bid to facilitate discussion and break down disciplinary silos to address this very complex, multi-disciplinary problem.

To kick off the Congress, Rick Green, writer, producer, director, comedian and winner of a Transforming Lives Award from the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) for his work in raising awareness about attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder, was this year’s key note speaker.



What follows is a brief overview of research presentations that were given at the conference.

### **Reintegration Into The Workforce**

At a session on reintegration into the workforce, four presenters discussed their respective research studies and innovative programs.

Dr. David Pedlar, Director, Research with Veterans Affairs Canada, shared information on a study that the agency is conducting which draws on research and stakeholder inputs to develop a civilian workplace reintegration model for veterans with mental illness. The study is funded by CIHR. Evidence shows that veterans experience higher rates of depression than the general population, and often face difficulties reintegrating back into civilian life.

Dr. Richard Leavy from Ohio Wesleyan University shared findings from his work examining research from the last decade on the relationship between work stress and alcohol use. He questioned if work stress causes alcohol use, or if the causal factor is alcohol use. Academics have argued that personal characteristics such as age and gender, and when the drinking occurs, should also be taken into account when studying the relationship between work stress and alcohol use. Cross-sectional studies indicate that there is a stronger likelihood of association between drinking and job stress when the job stress is due to interpersonal conflicts such as workplace abuse and sexual harassment, and the drinking can be classified as abuse, not just heavy drinking.

Remaining presenters highlighted two innovative programs which build on the strengths of consumer/survivors.

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# We Can Do It! *continued*

Dave Gallson from the National Network for Mental Health, a consumer/survivor initiative, spoke about the BUILT Network, a customer service employment training program for people experiencing mental illness. Developed in consultation with employers and consumer/survivors, the program began in 2002 in North Bay, Ontario and is now run in several locations across Canada with the support of the HRSDC Opportunity Funds. Research results indicate that a high percentage of trainees find and retain work as customer service representatives.

Promising practices from the CAMH Employment Works! program were shared by Diana Capponi, coordinator of the hospital's initiative to integrate consumer/survivors into the CAMH workplace. To learn more about this program, please see the Employment Works! article on the OMHAKEN website, at:

[https://www.ehealthontario.ca/portal/server.pt/community/promising\\_practices/1640](https://www.ehealthontario.ca/portal/server.pt/community/promising_practices/1640)

## CIHR Plenary

Several Scientific Directors from the CIHR presented on the last day of the conference. As the federal government agency which funds health research in Canada, CIHR plays an integral role in the field of research on mental health and addictions in the workplace.

CIHR's Institute of Population and Public Health focuses on the social determinants of health, research which looks at pathways to health equity and reducing chronic disease. The Institute is particularly interested in implementation research, and is developing a more conceptually linked, programmatic approach to its research projects.

Dr. Joy Johnson, Scientific Director with the Institute on Gender and Health, pointed out that workplace bullying and other violent dynamics in the workplace can be studied as they relate to

violence and health. She added that workplaces are often highly divided according to gender. Dr. Colleen Flood, Scientific Director with the Institute on Health Services and Policy Research, highlighted the Partnerships for Health System Improvement, which supports teams of researchers and decision makers to conduct applied health systems and policy research together. Dr. Flood remarked that research becomes more relevant and applicable with the involvement of different partners.

Panelists observed that funding for community based research continues to be discussed within CIHR. Currently, applicants have to be academics or affiliated with a teaching hospital to apply for CIHR funds.

To read the Congress program, to learn more about the range of sessions that were offered, and to download some of the panelists' PowerPoint presentations, please visit the Conference website at:

<http://www.wrepcamh.org/>.

Stay tuned for a special issue of *HealthCarePapers* on Mental Health and the Workplace that will reference discussions from the Conference. The expected date of publication is Spring, 2010.

The conference was sponsored by CIHR, CAMH and a host of other partners.

Dr. Carolyn Dewa was the Congress Chair and can be reached by email at: [Carolyn\\_dewa@camh.net](mailto:Carolyn_dewa@camh.net)

Dr. Carolyn Dewa is the Program Head, Work and Well-being Program and a Senior Scientist at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health; CIHR/PHAC Applied Public Health Chair; and Associate Professor, Department of Psychiatry, University of Toronto.



If you have a story or piece of information related to OMHAKEN that you would like to share, please do drop us a line. We'd love to hear from you. Please contact either Heather Bullock (Manager, Knowledge Exchange) at [heather\\_bullock@camh.net](mailto:heather_bullock@camh.net) or Nandini Saxena (Communications Associate) at [nandini\\_saxena@camh.net](mailto:nandini_saxena@camh.net). Unless otherwise noted, all content has been developed by Nandini Saxena.

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